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# Teaching Reading to Middle School English-Language Learners with Learning Disabilities in Reading: Teacher Beliefs, Experiences, and Practices

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# Teaching Reading to Middle School English-language Learners with Learning Disabilities in Reading: Teacher Beliefs, Experiences, and Practices

**by**

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# Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to teachers
who willingly open their classroom doors to researchers and invite the gaze of others to their work. Improving educational outcomes for students outside the mainstream, including English-language learners with learning disabilities, depends on teachers' willingness to share their thoughts, concerns, and insights into the important work they do with these students and their willingness to open their teaching to review.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my family.
Without their sacrifices, this work would not have been possible.

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# Teaching Reading to Middle School English-language Learners with Learning Disabilities in Reading: Teacher Beliefs, Experiences, and Practices

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Teachers of English-language learners who struggle to read should be knowledgeable about the processes and manifestation of second language acquisition, the relationship between L1 and L2, and the ways in which culture influences teaching and learning so as to be able to draw on that knowledge in planning effective reading instruction. While recent research suggests that critical features of effective reading instruction for native English-speakers are also effective for EL learners (Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson, & Francis, 2005), additional emphasis on language development is needed (Fitzgerald, 1995; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004) for students learning in their second language.

The goals of this investigation were to explore teachers' beliefs about effective reading instruction for middle school English language learners, to uncover teachers' thinking in regards to modifying their reading instruction for EL learners with LD, to

chronicle the content and methods implemented by the different participants as either noted in my observations or described by teachers, and to identify the challenges and successes these teachers had experienced. Given the goals of the investigation, the methods most suitable for approaching and carrying out this endeavor were qualitative in nature.

Hypotheses suggested that teachers lacked knowledge about instructional practices that address the language needs of EL learners with LD, and had only a basic awareness of how to scaffold for these students. Teachers did not seek out this knowledge, and the result was minimal differentiation and accommodations for EL learners. Participants engaged in minimal lesson planning, thus missing out on an opportunity to reflect on their students' needs and characteristics, given the nature and scope of their selected curriculum. Teachers' classroom instruction was shaped by the particular reading program in place and influenced by the nature of teachers' preparation program; if the program de-emphasized components such as fluency or vocabulary, there was a corresponding de-emphasis in attention to these skills in teachers' instruction. Teachers conceptually enveloped (Shanahan, 2001) the EL learners in their class with native English-speakers, and appeared ambivalent about their responsibilities for this group of students. Participants demonstrated a one-size-fits-all approach to their instruction, which may be an artifact of their teacher education programs and district initiatives.

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In a previous research study at a local middle school, the 6th grade math teacher commented that in her lowest math class was a substantial number of students who were learning English as a Second Language (ESL). She then mused that, unlike many of the native English-speaking students in the class, the ESL children "can *do* the math, actually, they *know how* to reduce fractions—*if* I explain the language to them." She then went on to remark that math classes today require good language skills because the emphasis is on problem solving rather than computation alone. Computation problems are very often embedded within word problems, she explained, which students must be able to read well enough to determine the mathematical operation required to solve the problem. Through reflecting and talking about the differences she observed between her EL Learners and native English-speaking students, this teacher articulated an inconsistency in the placement of mathematically capable students in the lowest ability group, which she attributed to their limited English language ability.

The math teacher's acknowledgement that the ESL students in her low-ability class were quite capable of handling the content struck a chord in me. I wondered whether other teachers had observed a similar pattern, and I wondered what content teachers thought about the practice of funneling children into low-ability classrooms according to the students' level of English language proficiency, rather than their ability to master more complex content in a particular academic area. I wondered about the school's basis and rationale for placing students capable of learning more challenging content in the classes with the least cognitive demands. I wondered about the effects on the children of the lower expectations such a class would inevitably hold for students as well as the long-term effects of a sequence of easier classes in a basic curriculum.

Furthermore, I wondered whether non-specialist teachers are generally prepared to instruct and assess the knowledge and progress of students who are learning new content that is presented in the language they are very much in the process of acquiring.

I recalled the exasperation and frustration of a middle school ESL teacher in whose classroom I had observed and assisted from time to time during the previous semester. The teacher had asked me to work with one particular boy who was a special education student. The ESL teacher, trained to teach English to children achieving at grade level, admitted that because of the student's disability, he did not know what to do with this child. Yet, the teacher was charged with teaching English to all of the students in the class, including those with disabilities. I wondered how teachers, both specialists and content teachers, make instructional decisions for children with needs and learning characteristics about which they may have only a cursory understanding and typically very little, if any, formal training.

I became curious in particular about how instruction in reading—a critical skill for academic and economic success that is inextricably linked to language—is provided to middle school children who, because of their learning characteristics and their heritage, find themselves at the intersection of special education and bilingual education or ESL programs: language minority students with a learning disability (LD) in reading. Given that middle schools, like all secondary schools, are not legally mandated to provide native-language instruction (Faltis, 1999; United States Congress, 1968), I wondered about the professional knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of educators who are responsible for teaching English language learners who struggle with reading. I am curious to learn how the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the students influence the teachers' instructional decisions.

At a time when the U. S. Hispanic population is increasing dramatically in number, finding ways to be more successful with this group of students takes on even greater importance as the school success and future economic prosperity of an ever greater number of students hangs in the balance. The term *Hispanic* has been used in this document as an umbrella term to describe people from the diverse countries and places where the Spanish, typically through colonization, strongly influenced the culture and language. These regions include Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and South American countries, though in Texas, most native Spanish speakers are of Mexican ancestry—not surprising, considering the state's political history. The use of the term Hispanic reflects a common Spanish-language heritage, but also reflects tremendous diversity in terms of traditions, values, customs, and worldviews. The terms *Latino(a)* and *Chicano(a)* are used whenever they were the terms of choice in a cited work.

## Classroom Context: Teaching Reading at the Middle School

In many school classrooms and districts across the nation, the secondary language arts teacher incorporates reading activities into the curriculum, and the students learn to read and write increasingly complex works with increasing skill and facility. However, for a variety of reasons, many students are not as well prepared for the academic demands of secondary schooling. Because many students transition to the secondary level unable to read, understand, and work successfully with grade-level materials, many middle schools and high schools offer reading classes for those students requiring extra support in developing word recognition strategies, vocabulary, basic comprehension skills, and critical reasoning (Austin Independent School District, 1999). The reading instruction is designed to complement the language arts or English class, rather than replace it.

Designing and implementing a program of reading instruction for students for whom elementary school instruction was insufficient to support the acquisition of proficient reading poses a challenge. Middle school teachers of reading have the task of planning reading instruction that responds to a diverse, complex, and sometimes confusing assortment of issues. For example, in many regions of the country, students are likely to come from a group that differs from that of the teacher not only in terms of ethnicity and sociocultural and behavioral norms, but also in terms of home dialect or language. Of those students whose native language is not English, some come to school with an extensive knowledge of academic English, others with little to none (Echevarria & Graves, 1998; Ovando & Collier, 1998). Students vary widely in the academic skills they bring with them to school, and there is great variability even among those recommended for supplemental reading classes and among those identified as having learning disabilities in reading. Then there is the question of the best approach to teaching reading, and, moreover, how to adapt reading instruction to the linguistic, sociocultural, and academic needs of the particular students in a class. Whether special education teachers, reading specialists, language arts teachers, or English as a Second Language teachers, middle school teachers of reading thus require an impressive repertoire of knowledge and skills, as these are the tools on which they will draw and to which they will refer on a daily basis in their efforts to bring their students' reading abilities up to grade-level.

## STUDENT DIVERSITY

According to the National Center for Education Statistics' report on the Condition of Education (2006), the overwhelming majority of public school teachers in 2003–04were white (83%) and middle class (average annual teaching salary was $45,822) and female (approximately 75%) (NCES, 2006). While the teaching profession has remained

largely homogeneous over the past decade, the diversity of the student enrollment has increased significantly (Hodgkinson, 1991; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993; Lazarín, 2006). Latinos, for example, represented 19% of total school enrollment in 2003 (Lazarín, 2006), second only to whites in numbers. Of the more than 8.8 million Latino students enrolled in K-12 schools in 2003-2004, nearly half were English language (EL) learners (Lazarín, 2006). Nearly 80% of all EL learners in U.S. schools were native speakers of Spanish (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2006; Lazarín, 2006). Grant (1992) named language, race, disability, class, and gender as characteristics in which students commonly vary; other areas of difference, such as sexual orientation and religious affiliation, can be added to this list (Nieto, 1992). Student diversity has not always been viewed in a positive light, and in fact, many have pointed to characteristics of the students, their families, and/or their culture as the root of the problems many culturally and linguistically diverse students experience in school (see Trueba, 1988, for a review).

**Linguistic and Cultural Diversity**

The academic achievement of Hispanic students whose home language is not English is greatly impacted by their teachers' ability to provide instruction that is adapted to the level of English language proficiency the students possess (Echevarria & Graves, 1998; Short, 1999). Of all the diverse characteristics, a language difference is perhaps the most salient characteristic of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and arguably the one that has drawn the most attention (Moll, 1988; Gersten & Baker, 2000).

A variety of terms exist in the literature to refer to students from non-native English speaking backgrounds who are in the process of learning English, including Limited English Proficient (LEP), language minority, bilingual, and English-language learner. Following Echevarria and Graves (1998), I use the term English-language learner

in this text because it does not suggest equal skill in both languages (as "bilingual" may imply to some), nor does it imply that the children have a problem. However, the term Limited English Proficient is often used in legislation (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001), and in instances when a source used LEP to refer to students who are not yet considered fluent in English, this term is used in this dissertation.

The term "limited English proficient," according to IDEA , refers to an individual aged 3-21, whether U.S.-born or not, who is enrolled or "preparing to enroll" in an elementary or secondary school whose "difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability" to meet state assessment proficiency levels, to be successful in all-English classrooms, or to participate fully in society [9101(25) of ESEA] [602(18) of IDEA]. In Texas, according to the education code statutes governing education for students reporting a home language other than English, a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) must convene within 4 weeks of a student's enrollment in a Texas school (Chapter 29.051 - 29.064 Subchapter B) (TEA, n.d.). The LPAC committee obtains assessment documentation on students' oral language proficiency in English and Spanish (if applicable), and for students in grade 2-12, also assesses reading/language arts. Students scoring below the 40$^{th}$ percentile on the reading or language arts subtest are considered limited English proficient (LEP), regardless of whether they scored "English proficient" on the test of oral language proficiency. Academic achievement must also be assessed. The LPAC then designates the language proficiency and academic achievement of students. Subject to parental approval, the LPAC committee also facilitates the

participation of LEP students in other programs they may be eligible for and also designates the initial instructional placement of LEP students (TEA, 2005[c]).

Pertinent to middle school aged students, Chapter 29.051 - 29.064 Subchapter B (TEA, n.d.) further indicates that districts in Texas are authorized to create a bilingual education program at any grade level, but are required to provide bilingual education only in the elementary grades where there are 20 or more students designated as LEP who share the same home language. Schools in Texas are required to provide ESL programs for LEP students deemed to need this support by the LPAC in any grade, and regardless of the number of students from any language group. The progress of students exited from language support services is monitored for the next two years to ensure they are being "academically successful" (TEA, 2006) (i.e., whether the student has obtained passing grades in all courses, has passed the state-wide assessment in English, and teacher and parental evaluation are considered as well). For students who qualify for special education and have both "a learning and language problem" (TEA, 2006), the student "should be served in both programs."

English-language learners are a very heterogeneous population and differ considerably in the level of second language skill they bring to the classroom. Recent figures indicate that as many as 5.4 million children are considered limited English proficient (LEP) in school (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). In Texas, figures for 2004-2005 indicate a LEP population of nearly 680,000 (TEA, 2005[b]), more than 15% of Texas school enrollment and an increase of 56.3% from 1993-1994 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Greenriver Independent School District, where this study took place,

reported that 21% of students were enrolled in bilingual or ESL programs in 2004, higher than average in Texas of 14% (TEA, (2005[b]). Nationwide, the majority (approximately 75%) of English-language learners speak Spanish as their first language (National Research Council, Institute of Medicine, 1998); in Greenriver, Spanish-speakers constitute 91% of those designated as limited English proficient (TEA, (2005[b]).

In addition to linguistic diversity, today's students differ significantly from one another and from teachers in regard to life experiences and culturally based norms and values that may influence their schooling (Hollins, 1996; Trueba, 1988) Students' home lifestyles reflect a continuum ranging from urban to rural as well as a wide range in socioeconomic circumstances (Voltz, 1995). A high proportion of youth who are English-language learners live in poverty. About half of such youth are in the bottom quartile in terms of socioeconomic status (SES), compared to slightly fewer than one in four of native English-speakers (Special Issues Analysis Center, 1993).

**Varying Levels of Academic Ability and with Disabilities**

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a learning disability refers to:

> a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. (P.L. 102-119, 20 U.S.C. § 1400)

"Disorders" qualifying as learning disabilities may include conditions such as perceptual disabilities, problems resulting from brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. However, qualifying disorders do not include

problems that are "primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage" (P.L. 102-119, 20 U.S.C. § 1400). MacMillan and Siperstein, as cited in Wilkinson, Ortiz, Robertson, and Kushner (2006), suggested that schools tend to "operationalize" (p. 129) learning disabilities as low achievement confirmed by the presence of a severe discrepancy between intelligence and achievement.

Many in the field of education who are knowledgeable about issues related to culturally and linguistically diverse populations, including, for example, the second language acquisition process, have been concerned for many years that current methods of identifying students for special education services often result in the under- or overrepresentation of students of minority background in special education (e.g., (Artiles & Trent, 1994; García & Dominguez, 1997; García & Ortiz, 2006; Wilkinson, Ortiz, Robertson, & Kushner, 2006). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 allows districts to use an alternative method—response to intervention (RTI)—to identify students for special education services in place of the practice of determining a discrepancy between students' assessed IQ and achievement levels (IDEA, 2004). The RTI model gives districts the authority to establish a process to determine whether a child responds to "scientific, research-based intervention" as part of the evaluation and eligibility procedures (IDEA, 2004, 118 Stat. 2706).

As Wilkinson et al. (2006) suggest, the promise of RTI as a means to identify for special education only those students truly in need of such services rests on the implementation of "scientific, research-based interventions". The problem is that EL

learners have been minimally represented in the research base on effective instructional practices, and therefore interpreting EL learner response to such interventions may result in similar patterns of over- and underrepresentation of EL learners in special education (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Wilkinson, et al., 2006). Given this history of inappropriate placement of minority background students and the complexity of issues inherent in identifying learning disabilities in students who are non-native speakers of English, a measure of caution and critique should be employed in regard to EL learners who have been identified for special education services.

Nonetheless, many students fail to show expected progress, and student diversity encompasses a full range of academic abilities, including special educational needs. National figures indicate that in 2001-2002, 6% of public school students aged 6-21 had been identified as having a specific learning disability, representing approximately half of all students identified with special needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Between 1987 and 2001, the proportion of students with disabilities who do not use primarily English in the home increased from 3.3 percent of students with disabilities to 14.2 percent (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003). Special education services are provided under a variety of models, and, similar to national trends, students with disabilities in Texas are served in a range of settings, with varying amounts of time in the general education and resource room setting. Most students with learning disabilities—some 80%—are identified as such due to difficulties in the area of reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), and thus, many students with LD would appear to benefit from instruction in reading.

Hispanic students constitute a significant portion of students with identified learning disabilities. In 2003–04, 16% of youth aged 3-21 enrolled in public schools receiving special education services under IDEA were Hispanic, compared to 61% who were white (U.S. Department of Education, 2004[b]). Hispanics represented over 18% of students with a specific learning disability (OCR, 2002). Hispanic students' widely recognized history of over- and under-representation in the special education system (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Gersten & Woodward, 1994; Robertson & Kushner, 1994) is due to a host of factors, including teachers' and administrators' lack of knowledge about the second language learning process and the ways in which this process is manifested in a child's language use and schoolwork (Ortiz & García, 1990).

## ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Nationwide, in 2001-2002, an estimated 357,325 students identified as LEP (9% of all LEP students) were concurrently being served in special education programs, nearly 56% of whom had identified learning disabilities (EL/LD) (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Pendzick, & Stephenson, 2003). Eight percent of all students in special education in 2001-2002 were English language learners ((Zehler et al., 2003). Zehler et al. (2003) reported that EL learners with disabilities were less likely than those without disabilities to receive special language services, and that services to more than 56% of EL learners with disabilities were provided entirely in English. In Texas, nearly 40% of students receiving special education services in 2003-2004 were Hispanic (TEA, 2005[a]). In 2002 in Greenriver, of those students needing LEP programs, over 9% were receiving services under IDEA; among students enrolled in LEP programs, nearly 8% had disabilities (OCR, 2002). Effective instruction for English-language learners with

learning disabilities must consider and respond to the characteristics of the student's reading disability, language abilities, and culture (Cloud, 1994; García & Malkin, 1993). Teachers need to understand and consider each of these "essential learner characteristics" (Cloud, 1993, p. 62) in planning instruction for EL Learners with disabilities, giving sufficient attention to each.

## STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN READING

Students who have been identified as having learning disabilities in reading (LD) typically score one and a half to two grade levels below the expected, based on assessments of intellectual functioning. Their disability is generally evident in many aspects of the reading process. Students with disabilities often have poor decoding skills and limited sight word vocabularies (Beattie, 1994; Catts, 1989; Chall & Curtis, 1992; Curtis & Longo, 1999). Even with adequate word reading skills, these students often lack fluency and prosody in their reading, and have a decreased ability to derive meaning from what they read (Mathes, Simmons, & Davis, 1992; O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea, 1987).

Approximately 90% of students with learning disabilities in reading experience difficulty in developing decoding skills (Foorman, Fletcher, & Francis, 1996). The poor decoding skills exhibited by students with LD seem to result from weak phonological sensitivity and phonemic awareness (Bryant & Bradley, 1985; Fox & Routh, 1984). There is evidence that Spanish children with reading disabilities show similar problems in phonological processes (Jiménez & Rodrigo, as cited in Jiménez González & Hernández, 2000). Weak phonemic awareness inhibits the student's learning of the alphabetic principle, or knowledge of the correspondences between letters and sounds, which, in turn, slows children's accessing the words' meanings (Adams, 1990; Stanovich, 2000; Torgesen, 1993). Thus, adequate word identification skills must be in place for skilled

reading with comprehension (Perfetti, 1986). This has been found for students with below grade-level reading at the secondary level (Curtis & Longo, 1999), as well, though some children with adequate decoding skills continue to have poor comprehension, which often is linked to below grade-level vocabulary (Curtis & Longo, 1999) and/or poor metacognitive and self-monitoring skills (Paris & Meyers, 1981; Wong, 1986).

## Current Best Practices in Reading Instruction

The reading process can be conceived of as "the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli to the recall of meanings built up through the reader's past experience" (Bond, Tinker, Wasson, & Wasson, 1989, p. 2). There is converging evidence that for efficient reading to occur, students must be skilled in five key areas: phonemic awareness (the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes, the smallest units of spoken language, in spoken syllables and words) (National Reading Panel, 2000), phonics (decoding), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, including higher-order comprehension such as making inferences and summarizing key information (National Reading Panel, 2000; Sáenz & Fuchs, 2002; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). For students with learning disabilities, instruction is most effective when it is systematic and explicit (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; Swanson, 1999) and teaches students to use strategies (Bryant, Goodwin, Bryant, & Higgins, 2003; Deshler, 2005; Schumaker, Deshler, Woodruff, Hock, Bulgren, & Lenz, 2006; Swanson, 1999; Vaughn, Klingner, & Bryant, 2001; Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson & Francis, 2005).

### THE TWO LEADING APPROACHES

The previous description of the reading process acknowledges both the "mechanics" inherent in efficient reading (e.g., facile word reading), as well as the important role prior experience with a particular topic has in limiting or facilitating the

reader's task of making meaning, the desired overarching goal of any program of reading instruction. While there is not space in these pages to discuss the pros and cons of a phonics-based approach (the "bottom-up" or part-to-whole theory) versus a literature-based or whole language approach (the "top-down" theory) to teaching beginning reading, a discussion of current research regarding best practices for literacy instruction is in order since it helps to illuminate the challenges inherent in the teacher's task of selecting the most appropriate reading approach for his/her students with reading-related disabilities. Over the past 25 years, the leading reading methodology on school and university campuses has shifted from a phonics, discrete skill-based approach to the other end of the spectrum, where beginning readers were expected to "pick up" reading skills (e.g., Goodman, 1986) in a natural manner as they read connected text in rich children's literature—the whole language approach. In recent years, code-based instruction is again being taught in schools. The debates around which instructional approach is most effective in bringing children to this level of reading skill have been called the Great Debate, or, more popularly, the Reading Wars (Stanovich, 2000).

As a field, special education has been influenced by the whole language movement (e.g., Flores, Rueda, & Porter, 1986; Franklin, 1992), and in fact, Vaughn, Moody, and Schumm (1998) report that 75% of the 14 special education teachers participating in their study of reading instruction occurring in resource rooms indicated that they used whole language as their principal approach to reading instruction, despite a lack of evidence for its effectiveness with students experiencing the most difficulty in learning to read (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley 2000).

Code-based instruction is the approach supported by a growing body of research with students who have poor decoding skills (Adams, 1990; Becker & Gersten, 1992; Swanson, 1999), the most frequently identified problem of students with learning

disabilities (Foorman, Fletcher, & Francis, 1996). However, English-language learners have often been excluded from empirical research focusing on reading disabilities due to the complexity of factors that make interpreting intervention results challenging (see Bos & Fletcher, 1997, for a review of sociocultural variables researchers should consider). However, the standards-based reform initiatives begun in the past decade call for greater inclusion of English-language learners as well as students with disabilities in high-stakes and other standardized, formal assessments (Mazzeo, Carlson, Voelkl, & Lutkus, 2000; National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1997; Rivera, Vincent, Hafner, & LaCelle-Peterson, 1997). Very little is known about effective reading instruction for English-language learners with learning disabilities, and therefore it has not been well-established whether English-language learners with LD require similar or different reading instruction from what has been successful with their native-English speaking counterparts.

The whole language approach to literacy instruction has been as thoroughly embraced by those serving the interests of English-language learners as those serving native English-speaking children (e.g., Freeman & Freeman, 1992; Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Goodman & Wilde, 1992; Ruiz & Figueroa, 1995). Because of the rich contextual support in instruction utilizing good literature, many feel a whole language approach provides the support that a code-based program may lack for children who are learning English and not from the predominant culture (Rueda & García, 1996). In recent years, however, many reading scholars have indicated that the teachers with the most impressive records generally integrate the most effective practices commonly associated with each of these approaches in their reading instruction (e.g., Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000; Rueda & García, 1996; Stanovich, 2000).

## READING INSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Reading instruction for students who are second language learners needs to take into account the second language acquisition process and instructional implications (Collier, 1989, 1995; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000; National Research Council, 1998). Teachers should recognize the different demands of conversational language and academic language, and be intentional in developing students' language proficiency by planning specifically for language development (Chamot, 1993; Collier, 1989, 1995; Cummins, 1981, 1991, 1999; Echevarria & Graves, 1998; Faltis & Hudelson 1998; Short, 1999). Language development refers to vocabulary, grammar, language structures encountered in text, formal speech and writing conventions, etc. (Collier, 1989; Echevarria & Graves, 1998).

Many scholars call for culturally relevant instruction and materials for English-language learners. Culturally relevant teaching is instruction that "is designed not merely to *fit* the school culture to the students' culture but also to *use* student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314, original emphasis). Many researchers (e.g., Hudelson, 1994; Jiménez & Gamez, 1996; Reyes & Valencia, 1993) recommend beginning with materials that are "culturally recognizable" to students, that is, texts that include references to events and information that are within the students' experiences (Jiménez & Gamez, 1996, p. 87). As Trueba suggested (1996) that cultural knowledge and values form the basis of reasoning, making inferences and interpreting, the more advanced literacy skills that are necessary to make sense of what is read and to progress beyond the most basic reading tasks. In culturally relevant teaching, students' cultures are widely acknowledged, honored, and respected. Students' experiences at home and in their community are incorporated into classroom activities (Franklin, James, &

Watson, 1996), and form the point of reference to which students and teachers create linkages to promote students' learning. Specific practices include scaffolding learning (providing visuals, realia, graphic organizers, and concrete materials to help understand more abstract concepts), incorporating collaborative and/or pair work, and implementing theme-based instruction that draws on students' background, culture, and language, and builds on prior experiences (Cloud, 1994; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2003; Echevarria & Graves, 1998; National Research Council, 1998).

Thus, reading instruction for middle school EL learners with LD should include the features of good reading instruction for students with learning disabilities as well as for students learning English. Furthermore, materials should be appropriate and interesting to the age group (Gambrell & Morrow, 1996; Worthy, 2000, 2002).

## Societal Context: Current Educational Trends of Inclusion

Not only are teachers challenged by the diversity inherent in their students, but current forces operating in the American educational arena are changing the ways schools have traditionally served many of these students. Two important movements currently influence the educational programs of the nation's school children.

First, many districts have instituted the inclusion approach to educating students with special needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Voltz, 1995). The inclusion approach, in which large numbers of students with disabilities ranging from mild to moderate and, in some districts, what some would consider severe disabilities receive their education in general education classes (Bina, 1995; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Lane, 1995). Recent data indicate that in 1996-1997, the most recent year for which this information is available, slightly more than 45% of all students with identified disabilities were served in general education classes, 29% received services in a resource room setting, and 21% in separate

classes (U. S. Department of Education, 2000b). Clearly, teachers throughout the school building and across the disciplines are assigned to teach academically diverse students (Fisher, 1999).

Second, the practice of providing English-language learners schooling in bilingual education programs has met renewed resistance in recent years (One Nation/One California, 1997; University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 2000), resulting in larger numbers of English-language learners being placed into English-language general education classes for the majority, if not the entirety, of their instruction. This is especially so at the secondary level, since the expectation is that most students will have transitioned to English by the time they enter middle school. Federal law (Title VII, Bilingual Education Act) does not provide for funding of bilingual classes at the secondary level; therefore, many states, even those with substantial numbers of language minority students, provide bilingual education only through the elementary grades. For example, in one large urban district in the Southwest, while more than a dozen elementary schools offer bilingual education classes, only two middle schools have such programs. Bilingual *special* education programs are still rarer, with 12 schools in this district at the elementary level providing this type of program, but none at the middle school. Yet middle school English-language learners with disabilities are attending these schools and are, in some manner, being provided an education. Not much is known, however, about the quality and nature of reading-related special education services for English-language learners with LD at the secondary level.

## Teachers' Readiness to Meet the Instructional Needs of EL Learners with LD

Clair and Adger (1999) point out that educators engaged in current reform efforts to improve schooling "face enormous challenges, not the least of which is the education

of teachers" (p. 1). Many scholars (e.g., Cloud, 1991; García & Dominguez, 1997; Gersten & Woodward, 1994; Reyes & Valencia, 1993; Zeichner, 1993) contend that the majority of Anglo teachers have little or no knowledge of factors such as the process and effects of second language acquisition, bilingualism, and multiculturalism that can affect the nature of the instruction language minority children need. Teachers candidly recognize their lack of preparation to succeed with such a diverse range of needs and characteristics. In a recent survey of teachers regarding their professional development and training (Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001), only 32% of teachers of students with disabilities reported feeling "very well prepared" to address their needs, and a similar percentage of teachers felt "very well prepared" to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural communities; 27% felt "very well prepared" to teach English-language learners (Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001). According to the U.S. Department of Education's 2000 survey on teacher preparation and professional development, the area of professional development in which teachers were least likely to participate was in addressing the needs of EL learners, though 42% of teachers reported teaching students with limited English proficiency (Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001).

### TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The Condition of Education (NCES, 2006) found that schools with high minority enrollment and private schools are more likely to employ teachers with 3 or fewer years of teaching experience—beginning teachers—than public schools and schools with low minority enrollment. The Council for Exceptional Children has established knowledge and skill standards for the preparation of beginning special education professionals (CEC, 2001). The standards reflect an awareness of the increasing diversity among students enrolled in special education, and hence, many specifically call for teachers to have knowledge and skills about issues that commonly appear in the multicultural literature.

Thus, in addition to a solid knowledge of effective instructional practices with students with LD in reading, teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning disabilities require at a minimum a solid understanding of the effects of language, culture, and disability on learning and teaching (CEC, 2001; Cloud, 1993; Milk, et al., 1992; Nieto, 1999), in particular an understanding of first and second language acquisition processes and their impact on learning/teaching and assessment (Burstein, Cabello, & Hamann, 1993; Calderon, n.d.; CEC, 2001; Cloud, 1993; Fradd & Lee, 1998; Milk et al., 1992; Nieto, 1992; Thonis, 1991; Yates & Ortiz, 1991) as well as knowledge about how to modify special education instruction to students' second language needs (CEC, 2001). Additionally, teachers should be aware of the interactions among culture, ethnicity, and social and economic conditions (Burstein, Cabello, & Hamann, 1993; CEC, 2001; Cloud, 1993; McNamara, 1998; Nieto, 1999) as well as be knowledgeable about how members of minority groups might cope with past and present racism (CEC, 2001; Ogbu, 1987, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers need the benefit of all of this information and skill in these areas to craft a coherent plan of instruction that they believe will provide sufficient power to effect real improvement in students' reading achievement.

## TEACHER BELIEFS AND DECISION MAKING

A discussion of the different areas of awareness, knowledge, and skills that teachers need to be effective with language minority students with LD in reading would be incomplete without acknowledging the importance of teacher beliefs, or teachers' implicit theories. Pajares (1992) concluded from his research of the literature that beliefs are "formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradiction caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience" (p. 324). He further noted that new phenomena are interpreted and understood through the "filter" of beliefs (Pajares, 1992), a view supported by others (e.g., Shavelson, 1983). What a teacher holds to be true (e.g.,

beliefs about students living in poverty, perceptions about the second language acquisition process, beliefs about what constitutes good reading instruction, how she defines her responsibilities vis-à-vis the students she teachers, the subject she teaches, at the grade she teaches, etc.) is reflected in the environment and instruction a teacher provides; research overwhelmingly bears this out (DeFord, 1985; Good & Brophy, 1994; Hamachek, 1995; Harste & Burke, 1977; Munby, 1982; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991; Stipek & Byler, 1997). Professional development in these areas aims to challenge and change underlying beliefs that teachers may hold about the diversity in their students (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994; Harrington & Hathaway, 1995; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003). The assumption is that increasing knowledge, broadening skills, and changing beliefs in these areas will translate into real differences in how teachers approach and provide instruction to culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learners (Artiles, Trent, Hoffman-Kipp, & Lopez-Torres, 2000), though further research needs to be done to verify whether this assumption is well-grounded.

Teachers' beliefs impact instruction in host of ways. For example, research on self-efficacy suggests that teachers' beliefs about their own efficacy can influence their behavior in terms of their decision making, the degree of effort brought to bear, and their persistence in working at improving outcomes for challenging students, with higher levels of efficacy associated with higher levels of effort and perseverance (Guskey and Passaro, as cited in Paneque & Barbetta, 2006). Karabenick and Noda (2004) reported in their survey of 729 educators that teachers believed themselves "significantly less able" (p. 70) to teach EL learners than to teach in general, reporting only moderate confidence in their ability to modify their instruction to meet the needs of EL learners. In their study of the self-efficacy beliefs held by special educators, Paneque and Barbetta (2006) found similarly that special educators reported feeling least competent and adept in working

with EL learners with disabilities. Research thus suggests that teachers' feelings of lower efficacy with EL learners might result in decreased effort and perseverance in the face of challenges encountered in teaching these students.

Grisham (2000) noted that teachers' "funds of knowledge" (p. 146)—their personal, professional, and practical sources of knowledge—interact to influence teachers' beliefs and are instrumental in their classroom practices. Research supports this; for example, findings from recent follow-up interviews to a study of 33 K-2nd grade teachers who participated in an extended, 120-hour professional development workshop on reading suggest that teachers' reported implementation of particular methods and strategies in their reading instruction were influenced by multiple factors. Influential elements identified included the reading workshop, the district's curriculum guidelines, teacher use of particular reading strategies, teacher beliefs about their instructional efficacy, and teachers' perception of students' educational needs and academic performance (Nichols, Zellner, Rupley, Willson, Kim, Mergen, & Young, 2005). Speaker and Madison (1994) posit that teacher beliefs, knowledge, planning, and decision making are integrated in teacher thinking. Teachers' decision making is thus influenced by a complex range of factors (Pajares, 1992; Speaker & Madison, 1994).

## THE CHALLENGE FOR TEACHERS

The ranks of students in the classrooms of general content area teachers are increasingly being populated with those with cultural and linguistic differences (Gersten & Woodward, 1994; Short, 1999; Voltz, 1995) in addition to those with special needs (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Voltz, 1995). As a result of the inclusion trends outlined above, secondary teachers increasingly are asked to teach students with characteristics and needs for which the teachers were not prepared in their pre-service programs (Cloud, 1994; Gersten & Woodward, 1994), students for whom many teachers did not

traditionally have the responsibility to teach (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000), and with whom many teachers previously had limited, if any, contact. The wide spread commingling of responsibilities among middle school teachers gives rise to many questions regarding the instructional assignment (which teacher assumes responsibility for the reading instruction?) and the day-to-day instruction of children at the intersection of this broader enactment of inclusion, that is, middle school English-language learners who have a disability in reading. Little research exists to guide middle school teachers in providing reading instruction for this student population, nor is much known about how teachers make instructional decisions on a daily basis in which they must simultaneously address language, disability, and cultural characteristics of their students.

## Focus of Inquiry

This study investigated educators' knowledge, perceptions, experiences, and practices related to teaching reading to middle school English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading. The challenges and successes participants identified in their efforts to improve reading achievement for this population were also explored. The study makes a unique contribution to the data base in that it documented from the perspective of participating teachers the challenges of planning and providing appropriate and effective reading instruction that responds to the academic, sociocultural, and linguistic needs of English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading who had recently (within 3 years) transitioned from an elementary bilingual special education or ESL program to middle school.

## Research Questions

It is important to articulate how instructional decisions are made, to be cognizant of how instruction is provided in practical terms, and to unpack the reasoning behind

teachers' decisions. Such discussions bring to light perhaps unexamined and unarticulated assumptions, provide insight into patterns underlying instructional decisions, and thus suggest areas to address in teacher education programs. The following questions guided my inquiry:

1. What are participating teachers' perceptions of the characteristics and factors that influence the reading achievement of their English-language learners with LD?
2. What are these teachers' knowledge and beliefs about what constitutes "good" reading instruction for EL learners with LD?
3. How are teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs about their students' reading achievement and "good" reading instruction reflected in their instructional practices?
4. Finally, what do these teachers identify as challenges or barriers as well as successes in their experiences of teaching reading to EL learners with LD?

# CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written about the changing demographics in our nation, and, indeed, Henry (1990) coined the term "the browning of America" (p. 28) to describe the effect of the shifts in immigration and birth patterns which presage substantial gains by people of color as compared to people of European heritage in the United States' population. Individuals of Hispanic origin constitute a significant portion of these newer generations of Americans. In fact, between 1995 and 2025, demographers anticipate that the Hispanic population will increase greatly, accounting for 44 % of the growth in this country's population by the end of the thirty-year period (Campbell, 1996).

More than half of the Hispanic population in this nation resides in just two states: California and Texas (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Additionally, the majority of Hispanics live in metropolitan areas, making them a highly urbanized population (Lazarín, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The median age of the Hispanic population is younger (27 years) (NCES, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) than that of the European American population (36 years) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Due to their relative youth and both geographic and urban concentration, Hispanic children are changing the demographics of the nation's school enrollment, particularly in the larger cities. The states that witnessed the most dramatic gains (increases of between 438% and 526%) in EL population between 1994 and 2004 are southern and central states not generally considered centers for Latino populations: South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Indiana (Lazarín, 2006). Hispanics currently constitute the largest racial or ethnic minority in nineteen states (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

In 2004, 12% of the population was foreign-born, and another 11% were second-generation Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In the 2003-2004 school year, approximately 5 million children designated Limited English Proficient (LEP) were enrolled in U.S. schools, representing 10% of school enrollment (GAO, 2006). Texas, the state enrolling the second largest population of English-language learners, indicated that during 2002-2003, nearly 630,148 students (approximately 15%) in Texas were designated as limited English proficient (LEP) and 572,019 received either ESL or bilingual education (TEA, 2005[s]). Texas officials estimate that 75-90% of the state's population of English-language learners is native-born (Zahr, 2000).

## Past School Achievement and Reading of Hispanic Students

A review of educational data for Hispanics quickly reveals that this nation's schools are not successful in educating large portions of this population. In 2001, the high school completion rate for whites was 91% but only 65.7 in the same period for Hispanics (Kauffman & Alt, 2004). Among Hispanics born outside of the United States, the dropout rate was even higher, at 43.4% (Kauffman & Alt, 2004). It is noteworthy that four of the five states with the highest percentages of Hispanic residents (CA, TX, NY, IL) are among the six that share the distinction as states in which Hispanic residents are least likely to attain a high school diploma (ID, TX, IL tied with CA, RI, and NY) (Campbell, 1996). Thus, effective programs for members of this population are lacking precisely where they are most needed and would have the greatest impact in terms of numbers of students who would benefit.

Not surprisingly, the high Hispanic dropout rate appears to be the culmination of years of lower academic achievement for many Hispanic students. For example, on a

nationwide measure of literacy administered to the nation's eighth graders by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2005, 81% of European American students attained scores at or above "basic," indicating that they were able to understand, combine ideas, and make inferences based on short, uncomplicated passages about specific or sequentially related information, compared to 55% of Hispanics. And, while more than 37% of European American students scored at or above proficient, indicating a more sophisticated level of reading proficiency including the ability to search for specific information, interrelate ideas, and make generalizations about literature, science, and social studies materials, only 14% of Hispanic students achieved at this level. Hispanic reading achievement patterns are the inverse of European Americans'. In the state of Texas, Hispanics represented 39% and whites represented 42% of the 8th graders taking the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); 41% of Hispanics scored below basic skills while 18% of whites did so (Nation's Report Card, 2005).

## Explaining Differences in Achievement

Much has been written about potential sources of the lower educational performance of many members of different minority groups in this nation. Researchers generally acknowledge that sociocultural factors have a significant impact on a child's schooling experience and schooling outcomes. Some, perhaps assuming that the "system is fine," ascribe poor school outcomes of minority children to the children themselves—maintaining that these children lack ability, self-discipline, or motivation to succeed (See for review: Cuban, 1989; Soto, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). The deficit model that was (and in many places, remains) so commonly utilized to explain minorities' poor academic achievement attributes their scholastic difficulties to perceived shortcomings, even pathologies, in the students' cultural background (See for review: Barrera, 1997; Sánchez,

1997; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997). In this view, parents are blamed for not transmitting the "right educational values (i.e., white, middle-class competencies)" to their children (García Coll et al., 1996, p. 1895); the superiority of white middle-class cultural values is seldom brought into question.

Other researchers, equally cognizant of the significant impact of sociocultural factors on children's schooling, have a different perspective on the roots of the lower academic achievement of minority children. These researchers see the institutions of society, and in particular schools, as the sites where children of color come face to face with US mainstream belief and value systems, an experience from which they emerge far from victorious (Barrera, 1997; Cardeñas, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Sánchez, 1997; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). According to Valenzuela (1999), in the name of caring for the children, teachers and schools strip minority children of their culture and community.

## SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

As social beings, people affect and are affected by the dominant social and political environment of the community and nation in which they live. In the United States, middle to upper class whites have historically wielded the political power and set the standard to which members of other ethnic groups are compared (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1992). Lacking a voice and the means to secure a more equitable distribution of power, low-status minorities have often found themselves existing along the edges of the dominant white society (Gonzalez, 1997). Relegated to the margins, people of color wrestle with the deleterious effects of *de facto* segregation, a generally lower socioeconomic status, and widespread societal and institutional racism (Ogbu, 1987, 1995). This ethnic and cultural racism contribute to Hispanic American students' disenfranchisement (Bennett, 1999).

Hispanics are strongly affected by these elements in American society. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2006) reported that ethnic isolation of Hispanics has increased over the past three decades, with 56% of Hispanic students attending a school that was over 75% minority enrollment, compared to 3% of white students. NCES (2006) also reported that 49% of Hispanics attended a high poverty school, where more than 75% of students qualified for free and price-reduced lunch. Hispanics as a group also live at a lower level of economic security than whites. While 12% of all white families in 2002-2003 with children under the age of 18 lived in poverty, nearly twice as many (23%) Hispanic origin families did so (NCES, 2006). Poverty has also been implicated as a factor contributing to Hispanic children's comparatively younger age at kindergarten entry; Hispanic parents, unable financially to provide their children with an extra year of preschool or child care, have at times found themselves forced to enroll their children in kindergarten as soon as they were age-eligible due to regulations at the subsidized childcare facilities these parents tended to use (see Cosden, Zimmer, and Tull, 1995, for a more complete discussion of Hispanic children's kindergarten experiences).

It is generally acknowledged that children of lower SES status do not achieve at levels comparable to their wealthier peers. For example, in an analysis of literacy measures drawn from the Young Adult Literacy Survey, V. Ortiz (1989) found that SES was strongly related to literacy attainment among young adult whites, African Americans, and foreign-born Hispanics, but, interestingly, not among young adult Hispanics born in the United States. Furthermore, the National Academy of Sciences (1994) reported that scholars participating in a workshop on issues pertaining to cultural diversity and early education concluded that social class and level of parents' education appeared to be more accurate and reliable predictors of children's home learning

experiences than were ethnicity and/or nationality. As one workshop participant surmised, "[p]arents who have acquired high levels of education and have thus had ample exposure to the values, expectations, and activities of the school culture are generally better equipped to prepare their own children for school" (National Academy of Sciences, 1994, Chapter 2, p. 3). (For a discussion of the striking impact SES had on measures of rural Latino reading and math achievement, see Hampton, Ekboir, & Rochin, 1995).

### CULTURAL CONTEXT

Some scholars conceptualize the primary source of low minority achievement as differences in cultural norms between the students and the American school system (Reyes & Valencia, 1993; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997). Most teachers are from the majority culture and teach in schools that promote and reflect values of the majority culture (Miller, 1995). Such teachers possess a thorough knowledge of mainstream behavior patterns, expectations, and values. This cultural knowledge parallels that of their white students and helps them better meet these students' needs, but does not prepare them to foster the success of their students of color (Cardeñas, 1995; Reyes & Valencia, 1993). Some areas where cultural incongruities between the teacher/school and Hispanic American students occur include in each group's values, preferences, and in their expectations for each other (Miller, 1995).

### Social Connections

In addition to the maintenance of moral order, young Hispanic children cited teacher fairness, praise for effort, and especially teacher caring as important dimensions of school climate (Slaughter-Dafoe & Carlson, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). A "flexible learning environment that meets the interpersonal needs" (Franklin, James, & Watson, 1996, p. 51) of students of color is a key factor to their academic success. In this regard,

Gentile and McMillan (1992) exhorted teachers to strive "to build meaningful relationships with … students," as such efforts are critical to motivating students to read and write (p. 636). Feeling that teachers cared for them emerged as a principal theme in Valenzuela's (1999) account of teen-aged Mexican American youths' schooling in a large urban Texas high school, indicating that feeling cared about remained important for older Hispanic students.

The social context of the learning environment has been linked to children's attitude and motivation to read (Gambrel & Morrow, 1996). Gambrel and Morrow's (1996) findings revealed the importance of students discussing their reading materials. The children in this study frequently reported talking with family members and peers about the books they were reading (over 75 % and 73 %, respectively). Hebert (1990), citing Cordeiro's study investigating highly academically successful Latino males, reported that a key factor in these students' success was strong friendships with other achieving Latino students; these social bonds were especially important in the middle school population. Many scholars (e.g., Oldfather, as cited in Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996; Sheets, 1995) have noted the importance of a collaborative, caring classroom community in motivating elementary children to engage in reading and literacy activities.

**Socialization Practices**

Cultural differences in socialization patterns surface in the classroom in a number of other ways, as well. For example, Irujo (1989) affirmed that Hispanics generally "not only interact at a closer distance than Anglos do, they also touch each other more" (p. 15). At the lower grades especially, the student may expect frequent physical contact with his teacher, such as patting and hugging (Dodd, Nelson, & Peralez, 1988-1989; Irujo, 1989) and would likely respond well to such reassuring marks of care and affection. However, the teacher may perceive the delivery of frequent pats and hugs as "babying"

the child and as delaying or inhibiting the student's ultimate goal (as viewed in the mainstream culture) of independence (Irujo, 1989). In similar fashion, the Hispanic student's preference for more interaction with the teacher and immediate feedback may lead the teacher to consider the child "needier," less independent, or even less capable than Anglo classmates (Darder & Upshur, 1992).

**Culture of the School**

The differences and even conflicts that exist between many teachers' values and expectations and those of their students from minority cultures are echoed in the larger arena of the school system (Hollins, 1996). Schools, Trueba and Bartolome (1997) noted, "mirror the culture, values, and norms of the greater society" (p. 3). Similarly, Reyes and Valencia (1993) asserted that most school curricula are derived from Anglo middle-class values that "emphasize individualism and competition as the essence of successful achievement," in which literature produced by Anglo authors typically constitutes the majority of the reading list. Minority viewpoints and stories are not represented (Darder, Ingle, & Cox, 1993; Gollnick & Chinn, 1994). Students disengage as a result of perceiving little connection between the stories and texts they read and their own experiences. Trueba and Bartolome (1997) posited that ethnic and cultural racism thus contribute to Hispanic American students' disenfranchisement. The teacher can do much to promote minority literacy skills by providing culturally relevant reading materials that portray and are "characteristic of both traditional and contemporary lifestyles" (Franklin, James, & Watson, 1996, p. 51), as well as by creating a culturally congruent learning climate.

**Language Issues**

Typically, English language learners develop conversational skills in their second language fairly quickly (3-5 years), though estimates vary (Cummins, 1999; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Collier, 1989). Conversational language proficiency corresponds to Cummins' (1999) *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (BICS), which, as the term implies, consists of the language used in personal conversations with peers. The meaning of such communicative exchanges is context-embedded and supported by pragmatic elements such as body gestures, facial expressions, and intonation (Cummins, 1999; Echevarria & Graves, 1998). Academic language skills correspond to the domain of language that Cummins termed *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). CALP refers to the context-reduced, vocabulary-rich language that carries the meaning in most classroom reading materials, including textbooks, where support for understanding the text lies in the bold print, headings, subheadings and subtitles, the organization of the text, etc. CALP is the currency required to carry out academic tasks in school that depend on literacy skills, and takes much longer to develop proficiency, on the order of 4-7 years or even longer (Collier, 1989; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000).

Thus, students typically display proficiency with oral conversational skills much earlier than they acquire proficiency in the registers of language the more context-reduced language used in academic settings that will allow them to compete successfully with native speakers on high stakes academic assessments (Collier, 1995; Cummins, 1979, 1981,1991; Ovando & Collier, 1998). Finally, though perhaps obvious, it bears articulating that, depending on the level of proficiency in L2 the student has acquired, instruction conducted in the language that is being learned as a second language can pose a significant barrier to learning and places students at risk of academic failure (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Goldenberg, 1996; Maldonado, 1994). According to NAEP (Nation's

Report Card, 2005), scale score differences between non-EL learners and EL learners were the largest of any groups compared at 43 points, even larger than the gap between students with disabilities and those without disabilities (39 points).

## Literacy Learning in School for English Language Learners

As indicated in Chapter I of this dissertation, many leading researchers have acknowledged the benefits of including effective practices from each of the predominant approaches to teaching children to read (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000; Rueda & García, 1996; Stanovich, 2000). Specifically, many of those who firmly support a program emphasizing word analysis skills tend to recommend that, in conjunction with working on developing phonological and phonemic awareness (respectively, the more encompassing realization that speech is made up of sounds distinguishable from meaning, and the more refined awareness that words are made of sounds that are "somewhat separable" and that can be manipulated (Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998, p. 96), students should have frequent opportunities to read in connected text, discuss what they read, and engage in a variety of literacy activities that promote reading fluency and comprehension (Adams, 1990). Whole language proponents generally acknowledge that while many children will pick up reading in an adequate fashion through working with a diverse array of rich, authentic reading materials, many other children will require systematic instruction to learn about the relationship that exists between letters and the sounds they make (Thompson, Mixon, & Serpell, 1996).

Stanovich (2000) criticized the polarization created in the field, noting that, "ironically, the primary casualties of the Reading Wars are … children who are not immersed in a literate environment and who are not taught the alphabetic code" (p. 363). Thompson, Mixon, and Serpell (1996) articulated the rationale for a balance in stating,

"To focus only on basic skills is to severely limit children's opportunities for becoming engaged readers; to omit these skills is to risk having children miss out on developing essential tools for lifelong learning" (p. 50). These authors asserted the appropriate curriculum for children of color will "foster the development of critical thinkers who are able to use basic skills to facilitate the construction of meaning and to create bridges to higher order thinking" (p. 50).

## IMPORTANCE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE READING INSTRUCTION

Selecting a well-balanced plan of reading instruction addresses only part of the challenge teachers of EL Learners with learning disabilities in reading must meet, for the approaches do not specify how to respond to the linguistic and cultural differences present in their students. With proficient decoding skills and a good grasp of the phonological system of the English language, children can become quite adept at “word calling”, or decoding the words but stopping short of the critical step of linking them to meaning if they have no way of making sense of the text or of connecting the new with the known. Knowledge children possess about their own culture includes familiarity with the scripts or schemata that are known to most individuals raised in their cultural group (Alvarez, 1991), which may or may not overlap with what is presented in the materials and in the methods of implementing instruction occurring in school. Children’s ability to make inferences or understand more challenging text is thus clearly linked to their life experiences and familiarity with the values and experiences in the text. Alvarez (1991) cautioned, "we cannot assume that students entering classrooms come prepared with a contextual framework that will aid assimilation of ideas presented either through lecture or textual readings" (p. 13).

G. E. García (1991) found evidence of these gaps among bilingual Hispanic students she tested and interviewed to identify factors influencing the English reading performance of bilingual Hispanic students. Analysis revealed the differences in comprehension scores were due to limited prior knowledge of some topics, lack of familiarity with cultural schemata, lack of knowledge of vocabulary terms used in both the test questions and response choices, and a tendency to interpret the test literally when selecting an answer (G. E. García, 1991). Furthermore, García found that Hispanic students required more time to complete the tests than did the Anglo students, perhaps as a function of the factors just mentioned. Similarly, Alvarez (1991) identified Hispanic students' limited understanding of ideas presented in narrative and expository texts and their lack of background knowledge as barriers to their success in comprehending and remembering information from text and as impediments to their "fill[ing] in the gaps with information not completely mentioned in the text" (p. 13). Teachers bear the responsibility of providing reading instruction that is responsive to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of their students in addition to students' specific reading-related strengths and weaknesses.

Disability, language, and culture interact with one another in complex ways that influence students' ability to profit from a given program of instruction. Language differences have been and many times still are mistaken as evidence of language disabilities (Cloud, 1993; Fradd, McGee, & Wilen, 1994; García & Ortiz, 2006; Ortiz & García, 1995; Ortiz & Maldonado-Colon, 1986). Willig (1986) reported, for example, that many behaviors which are considered symptomatic of a learning disability in monolingual children are characteristics commonly observed among students trying to function in a second language.

## TEACHERS' LEVEL OF PREPARATION

A recent study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2006) indicated that approximately 42% of the nation's public school teachers reported having English-language learners on their class rosters. However, only 2.5 % of teachers instructing English language learners actually have an academic degree in English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual education (NCES, 1997a), and only 30% of teachers with English language learners in their classes report having received any training at all in teaching strategies recommended with EL Learners. Specifically, teachers in schools with higher percentages of EL Learners who teach classes in which 50% or more of the students are second-language learners are much more likely to have earned an academic degree in ESL or bilingual education (20%) or to have received training in effective practices with this population (87%). For comparison, among teachers with 10-50% English-language learners in class, 3% earned a degree and 48% received training in effective strategies, while of the teachers whose classes consisted of fewer than 10% English-language learners, fewer than 1% reported having earned a degree and 19% indicated they had had some training (NCES, 1997a). NCES (2002) reported that 26% of teachers in their national survey reported some preparation in teaching EL learners; teachers reported spending a day or less in the year preceding the survey in all areas of professional development included on the survey except for the content area of their main teaching assignment.

Reyes and Valencia (1993) strongly recommended that these knowledge gaps be reduced through extensive on-going periods of training to help school staff become more effective with Latino populations. Children are part of a family, community, and larger social system, and, as such, events, experiences, and values based in the culture of the family and community affect them and, indeed, are influential in shaping children's

development. Familiarity with and regard for those features of children's cultures that have relevance for learning and teaching can assist the teacher to be better prepared to meet the educational and social needs of all children in the classroom (Hollins, 1996; Thompson, Mixon, & Serpell, 1996; Trueba, 1988; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997). Trueba (1988) argued that culture is of primary importance at both the "collective and individual levels for the academic achievement and overall psychological adjustment…of all minority children" (p. 270). Thus, celebration of and reference to students' heritage is not restricted to a particular month or holiday.

Teachers of English-language learners who struggle to read have an even greater need to be knowledgeable about the processes and manifestation of second language acquisition, bilingualism, and a broad array of areas of cultural differences so as to be able to draw on that knowledge in planning effective reading instruction. To support them in their efforts, teachers working with culturally and linguistically diverse students should possess a fundamental set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Milk, et al., 1992) regarding the students represented in their classrooms and in the community in which they teach. Many scholars recommend a host of competencies teachers need to be effective with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, including:

1. An understanding of cross-cultural communication styles (McNamara, 1998; Nieto, 1992; Voltz, 1995), social networking systems (McNamara, 1998), and awareness of variations in social norms and unspoken rules (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Nieto, 1992; Voltz, 1995).
2. Knowledge of the second language acquisition process and instructional implications (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Cloud, 1993; Collier, 1995, 1998; Cummins, 1979, 1981, 1991; Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004).

3. Awareness of variations in values and cognitive orientations (Nieto, 1992; Thonis, 1991; Trueba, 1988; Voltz, 1995).
4. Understanding of cultural influences on child-rearing practices and socialization patterns (Fradd & Lee, 1998; McNamara, 1998; Voltz, 1995).
5. Knowledge of culturally-based differences in perceptions and beliefs about disability (Harry, 1990).
6. Knowledge of variations in attitudes toward education (McNamara, 1998; Nieto, 1992), including the goals of schooling.
7. Knowledge of culturally congruent instructional practices (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Nieto, 1992, 1999; Sheets, 1995; Trueba 1988).
8. Knowledge of historical experiences of specific ethnic groups, including U. S. experiences (McNamara, 1998; Nieto, 1992, 1999; Sánchez, 1997; Thonis, 1991; Voltz, 1995).
9. Contributions of members of these cultural groups in academic fields as well as in the arts (McNamara, 1998; Voltz, 1995).
10. Ability to work collaboratively with other professionals (Milk et al., 1992).

Competence in the above areas will allow teachers to approach instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students with a level of cultural skill and knowledge that parallels the cultural expertise they bring to their teaching of native English-speakers.

## Reading Instruction for EL Learners with Learning Disabilities

Scholarly articles focusing on effective schooling practices for English-language learners have been increasing in number, though the purpose of much of the literature in

regard to the education of English-language learners has been to describe an author's position on an issue, to propose a framework to understand and address inappropriate aspects of past and/or current instructional or referral practices, or to elucidate theories in the field, some of which are vehemently debated in the literature as well as in the newspapers (e.g., how many years of bilingual education, if any, are associated with optimum educational outcomes).

Very little instructional intervention research has been conducted with English-language learners with disabilities (Gersten & Baker, 2000), and even less research has been published that focuses on middle school English-language learners with disabilities in reading, and hence, only a small body of research examines effective reading instruction practices for this population. As discussed in Chapter I, therefore, teachers must look to the research on effective reading instruction with students with LD in conjunction with the research on good practices with EL learners in general education settings, though this runs the risk of downplaying the important step of considering "what works with whom, by whom, and in what contexts" (Cunningham and Fitzgerald, as cited in Klingner & Edwards, 2006, p. 108).

Few empirical studies focus on the day-to-day planning and decision making that are integral to teachers' provision of reading instruction in English to middle school English-language learners with disabilities in reading or that investigate the interactions among teachers' beliefs and understandings about their students and reading instruction, students' characteristics, and teachers' knowledge and experiences in this area.

## Context of Inquiry

Many factors, including the skills and knowledge of teachers, the characteristics of the student cohort, and the instructional program through which a child's education is

provided, have the potential to significantly impact the trajectory of a child's education. Scholars are coming to recognize the middle school years as a critical period in the academic life of many minority students. Indeed, those language minority special education students who have been educated primarily in a dual language program in their elementary years (Spanish in most cases) make a double transition at the end of 5th grade: first, from elementary to middle school, with all of the social and curricular changes this entails, and second, from an environment wherein content instruction was provided to a significant degree in the child's native language to an environment wherein instruction is presented primarily (if not totally) in English. Clearly, middle school teachers play an important role in the schooling experience of these children, and those who are responsible for the teaching of reading, the skill that is integral to achievement in virtually every content subject in school, face a significant challenge.

Middle school general education content teachers, under current educational reform efforts, are frequently responsible now for educating students who previously received instruction in special education programs or in segregated English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms; at times these students constitute a significant portion of the class roster (personal observation, 1999). ESL teachers, trained to teach English to new immigrants, are likewise feeling the effects of the inclusion movement as English-language learners with special needs are scheduled into their classes (Cloud, 1993; personal observation, 1999). Special education teachers, like their general education counterparts, are now asked to teach students who, in addition to having one or more disabilities, are very much in the process of learning English as a second language, whether these teachers have any knowledge of the process, educational manifestations, and academic challenges of second language acquisition or not. Clearly, categorical areas of expertise and responsibility (e.g., the "math" teacher; the "ESL teacher"; the "bilingual

teacher"; the "Special Education teacher") no longer accurately delimit the extent and nature of the instruction teachers are called on to provide in many communities. When special education students represent considerable cultural and linguistic diversity, the legal mandate to provide an appropriate, individualized education becomes even more challenging.

The study focused on the experiences of middle school teachers who are responsible for the reading instruction of English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading. The purpose of the study was not to verify whether middle school teachers are providing instruction that addresses what is known about the components of effective reading (e.g., fluency, comprehension), though teachers did teach many of these skills and referred to these components in describing their program of reading instruction. Nor was the purpose of the study to ascertain which of the two leading approaches to reading instruction (whole language or skills-based) teachers followed, though teachers identified which approach they favor. Rather, the purpose of this study was to learn how middle school teachers make instructional decisions for their students with reading-related disabilities who are culturally and linguistically diverse and to find out how teachers' beliefs about and knowledge and skills in working with diverse students is reflected in their reading instruction for these students.

# CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN

The goals of this study were threefold in nature, all of which centered on the reading instruction currently being provided to English-language (EL) learners with learning disabilities (LD). One goal of the investigation was to explore the knowledge and beliefs about effective reading instruction for middle school English language learners with LD held by the teachers charged with teaching reading to this population of students. The second goal of the study was to uncover and describe teachers' planning regarding reading instruction for EL learners with LD, and to chronicle the content and methods implemented by the different participants to teach reading, as either noted in my observations or described by teachers. The final goal of the study was to learn what were the challenges and the successes these teachers had experienced in working with ELLs with LD from the perspectives of the teachers themselves. I approached this study with the idea of learning how teachers view their work with ELLs with LD. Thus, the constructivist paradigm was the most appropriate model for achieving the goal of exploring the following questions with the participating teachers:

1. What are participating teachers' perceptions of the characteristics and factors that influence the reading achievement of their English-language learners with LD?
2. What are these teachers' knowledge and beliefs about what constitutes "good" reading instruction for EL learners with LD?
3. How are teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs about their students' reading achievement and "good" reading instruction reflected in their instructional practices?
4. Finally, what do these teachers identify as challenges or barriers as well as successes in their experiences of teaching reading to EL learners with LD?

## Research Design

Because the aim of the research project was to explore the knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practices of middle school educators who teach reading to EL learners with LD, the methods most suitable for approaching and carrying out this endeavor were qualitative in nature. Interviewing, observing, and dialoguing with educators who are responsible for the reading instruction of EL learners with a disability in reading were the most appropriate inquiry strategies. The goal of the discussions and observations was to illuminate the complexity of the contexts in which reading instruction to EL learners with LD in reading was provided by participants, as perceived by the participants who are the primary agents in these contexts.

I investigated teachers' perceptions of their students and the reading instruction they provide to English-language learners with a reading disability according to the constructivist paradigm of inquiry. Constructivist research is predicated on the assumption that reality is co-constructed, that is, that the researcher and the researched are "interactively linked so that 'findings' are *literally created*" over the course of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, original emphasis, p. 207). Constructivist research differs from that done in the post-positivist paradigm in that it assumes that what is viewed as "real" is relative; there exists "not a single objective reality but multiple realities" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 12; Guba & Lincoln, 1998) of which the researcher must be cognizant. This means that each of us has our own perception of reality, which we construct based on our beliefs and experiences.

The specific research strategy that I used is Naturalistic Inquiry. Naturalistic Inquiry is a strategy, or collection of methods, that seeks to allow the researcher to get as close to understanding the focus of the inquiry from the point of view of the participants as is possible. Naturalistic Inquiry methods would allow me to understand as best I could

how my participants perceive their students, their instruction, their challenges and successes with this population, as well as how they perceive their reading instructional practices. I am interested in these foci "from the point of view of the interacting individuals" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 187). Because each participant possesses a unique understanding and perspective about his or her students and unique knowledge and beliefs about how best to provide reading instruction to EL learners with LD in reading, I believed dialoguing with the teachers and observing classroom instruction and interactions were the best means to arrive at this "reconstructed understanding" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 187).

## Data Generation and Collection

### CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study took place in Greenriver, a diverse city located in the state of Texas with a population of 700,000, which rises to over a million if one includes the adjacent smaller cities and communities that form the metropolitan area. Greenriver is a center for trade, real estate, and service industries, as well as a host of government services and activities. A significant portion of Greenriver's minority residents live in one area of Greenriver, a legacy from the city's years of segregation in the early 1900s when municipal services—schools, sewers, parks— were made available to African American residents, for example, only in one area of the city. As the Mexican American population rose from less than 2% in 1900 to comprise 11% of the city's total in the 1940s, most of these Latino residents tended to settle in the a portion of this more ethnically diverse quarter of Greenriver. Demographic maps reveal that, while there are Latino neighborhoods in other areas of Greenriver, the early patterns of settlement in certain sectors remain in place today. The Latino population of Greenriver has grown to over

30% of the total, African Americans comprise around 10%, Asians make up nearly 5%, and whites comprise 53% of the total population of the city.

As a large urban school district, the Greenriver Independent School District serves the educational needs of its approximately 75,000 students via over 100 schools, approximately 15 of which are middle or junior high schools. The District's website reported that in the year of the study, the 2001-2002 school year, approximately 50% of the student population was Hispanic, about 33% was white, 17% was African American, and a much smaller percentage of students were Asian or Native American (www.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker ). The state's Academic Excellence Indicator System indicates that 20% of the students attending Greenriver schools were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Fifty percent of students in the District were identified as qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

**PURPOSIVE SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

To facilitate the task of locating teachers who had the responsibility of teaching reading to EL learners with LD, I purposively identified a pool of eight area middle schools that were identified on the District's website as the 'receiving' schools of one to two elementary schools housing bilingual special education programs. My goal in doing so was to identify middle schools that would consistently have large numbers of English-language learners with learning disabilities among their student enrollment. I anticipated that teachers at these schools would have more experience and knowledge about teaching reading to EL learners with LD, and would thus have more to say about the focus of my study than teachers at a school enrolling relatively few EL learners with LD. Purposive sampling allowed me to select participants and settings "where [and for whom] the processes being studied are most likely to occur" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. xiv). My initial pool of eight middle schools appeared likely to enroll significant numbers of

students recently exited from an elementary bilingual special education program. It should be noted that no middle schools in the District offer bilingual special education services.

I telephoned the principals of the eight middle schools and briefly outlined the purpose, nature, and extent of my proposed investigation. Five of the schools I approached indicated that they did not wish to participate in the study at that time due to various reasons, including other commitments and a reluctance to increase the burden on teachers; one school indicated it did not have students fitting the study criteria. I was able to secure permission to conduct my investigation in three of the eight middle schools I had initially approached about the study.

The principals at each of the participating campuses directed me to the special education teachers, curriculum specialists, or reading teachers who they felt could help me determine which educators on each campus were responsible for the reading instruction of English-language learners with learning disabilities. I had anticipated developing a varied pool of participants, including special education teachers, reading specialists, and perhaps ESL teachers. I had also anticipated inviting to participate in the study only those teachers whose students included EL learners with LD who had been in a bilingual special education program in 5$^{th}$ grade. I learned as I worked to identify a pool of participants that these criteria were too stringent.

These criteria proved impossible to meet for at least four reasons. First, while the District has many English-language learners served in bilingual special education programs at the elementary level, these students disperse across the District at the middle school level, and it was not feasible to track these students to their various middle school campuses. Each middle school I approached seemed unsure if they had any students meeting these criteria. Second, three of the campuses that had declined participation (out

of the expressed desire not to ask more from their teachers) seemed like the schools most likely to have the largest population of EL learners with LD from an elementary school housing a bilingual special education program. Third, I was told by a teacher that on some middle school campuses, English-language learners who do not arrive at middle school with an identified disability are often not referred and identified for special education services—despite academic patterns of achievement that tend to trigger a referral in a native English-speaking student—until the English-language learners exit the ESL program. Finally, in some instances, if the resource teacher feels that an English-language learner does not have adequate English skills to understand his or her instruction, the student may be sent back to the ESL teacher for reading instruction. For example, when I approached one 6th grade special education teacher about participating in the study, she reported that she did not currently have any students who met the criteria, but that she had had one at the beginning of the year. This teacher stated that, experiencing difficulty getting through to this student, she had sent the student "back to ESL" for the semester. The student had since returned to the teacher's classroom, and was "doing fine," with a bilingual peer to help out, if a translation was ever needed.

After much reflection, I decided to expand my criteria and invite teachers to participate who provided reading instruction to students with learning disabilities who either (a) had a history of participation in a bilingual or bilingual special education program within the past three years, or (b) students retaining the District's Limited English Proficient designation whom the participating teachers identified as being impacted by their English language proficiency. All students targeted for observation had an identified disability, and thus, by definition, had not attained grade-level skills in reading (and who may have been reading two to five years below grade level).

Additionally, although I had initially planned to invite only 6th grade teachers to participate, I decided to extend an invitation to teachers of 7th and 8th graders, as well, since the pool of 6th grade teachers who acknowledged they taught students fitting the criteria and who agreed to participate was very small. Five teachers who taught reading or reading and language arts to EL learners with LD who fit these expanded criteria who were employed at three area middle schools agreed to participate in the study (See Appendix A for Consent Form). They were asked to identify students in their classes fitting the student criteria and permission slips (See Appendixes B, C, and D) were distributed to selected students who were in a class with at least three EL learners; this density of EL learners was established to allow observations to take place in the event of normally occurring student absences. The parents of twelve of the 25 students the teachers identified as English language learners in their classrooms gave permission for their children to participate, and thus, these twelve students served as secondary participants. Pseudonyms are used for the District, the schools, the teacher participants and the students to protect participants' confidentiality.

**Schools**

All three middle schools in which my participants taught are situated in south-central Greenriver, all within a few miles of each other. Table 1 records demographic data of the students attending the three schools in which participating teachers taught. To provide a more complete profile of each school, the racial and ethnic profiles of the teachers employed on each of the campuses are presented, as well.

***Sánchez Middle School***

Largest and newest of the three participating schools, Sánchez Middle School had been erected just a few years before this study took place in an area of the city recently

Table 1: Demographics at Participating Middle Schools, 2001-2002

| **Enrollment Profile** | **Sánchez** | **McKinney** | **Lyons** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Student Enrollment | 1050 | 850 | 1,000 |
| Hispanic | 61% | 67% | 60% |
| White | 26% | 18% | 28% |
| African American | 11% | 13% | 11% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 2% | 2% | 1% |
| LEP | 11% | 14% | 11% |
| ESL program | 5% | 14% | 9% |
| Special education | 15% | 18% | 21% |
| Free and reduced lunch | 55% | 68% | 46% |
| Student mobility[a] | 19% | 25% | 19% |
| **Faculty Profile** | | | |
| Hispanic | 15% | 24% | 20% |
| white | 77% | 65% | 73% |
| African American | 5% | 4% | 7% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 3% | 7% | - |

Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker [2002 campus AEIS Report]

[a] The state defines a *mobile student* as one who attended a school for less than 83% of the academic year, and thus has missed six weeks or more of school (www.greatschools.net/definitions/tx/mobility.html).

experiencing significant growth. Enrollment was approximately 1050 students in grades 6-8. The school's website indicated that Sánchez was involved in several programs and initiatives, including an Institute for Learning, Computer Integrated Instruction, and Alternative Assessments, among others. Student enrollment was nearly two thirds Hispanic, less than one third white, and approximately one tenth African American, with the remaining students identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. Student mobility at the campus was approximately 20%, while nearly 50% of students were identified as qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Approximately 11% of Sánchez students were identified as Limited English Proficient. The District's website indicated that a small number of Sánchez students were enrolled in ESL programs. Of the 1050 students, approximately 15% were receiving special education services, the lowest percentage among the three participating schools. Sánchez also employed the fewest number of educational aides (5), less than half the number working at Lyons. Teachers represented various ethnic backgrounds, though this school's teaching staff was the least diverse of the three participating middle schools, in that more than three quarters of the teachers were white (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ perfreport/aeis/2002/campus.srch.html)

***McKinney Middle School***

Oldest of the three, McKinney Middle School had been built in the late 1800s within a few miles of Greenriver center. The school had an enrollment of approximately 850 students in grades 6-8 in 2001-2002, and was the smallest of the three participating schools. McKinney's Limited English Proficient population, at approximately 14%, was proportionally the greatest of the three. Similarly, the proportion of McKinney's population identified as qualifying for free and reduced lunch was the highest of the three schools (www.Greatschools.net), and some 18 points higher than the District's 50% figure. Eighteen percent of McKinney students had identified disabilities, placing

McKinney's special education population between the other two schools and some 6 points higher than the figure for the District. The school employed 8 teacher aides to support teaching and learning. The majority of teachers at McKinney were white (67%).

McKinney's website indicated that it was a US Department of Education Blue Ribbon School, and known for its bilingual literacy program, among other initiatives. One section of the website listed a variety of programs and initiatives that McKinney had undertaken in recent time, including an Accelerated Reading Initiative/Project Read Initiative and Writing/Math/ Reading Across the Curriculum. McKinney's website stated that teachers were required to obtain certification in a host of areas, including English as a Second Language, Pre-Advanced Placement, Cooperative Learning, and Gifted/Talented. In my search for appropriate schools in which to do my study, McKinney's posted requirement for teachers to be certified in English as a Second Language drew my attention. In my initial meeting with the principal, who had been at the school for just a few years, I inquired about the certification requirement on the website; he simply smiled and indicated that he did not believe all of McKinney's teachers had such certification. As will be described later, I eventually learned the story behind this website statement during an interview with a teacher at one of the other participating schools.

***Lyons Middle School***

Lyons Middle School, built in the early 1970s, is located within 10 miles of McKinney. Lyons' website indicated the school was participating in several initiatives, for example, Project Read, a program called Study, Organizational and Social Skills (S.O.S), a Tutor Program Plan, and two math-related initiatives. Approximately 1,000 students attended Lyons during the 2001-2002 school year. More than half of student enrollment was Hispanic, whites made up about one third of the student body, African

Americans constituted one tenth of enrollment, and a small number of students were identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. Of the three schools, Lyons had the lowest rate of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, slightly lower than the number for the District. Just over 11% of students were designated as LEP, similar to Sánchez's rate. The District's website indicates that nearly 9% of the students at Lyons was enrolled in an ESL program. With just over 21% of students enrolled in special education, Lyons had the highest proportion of students with identified disabilities among the three schools. Lyons employed 11 educational aides to support teaching, the highest number of the participating schools. The mobility rate among Lyons' students, though significant at nearly 20%, was less than McKinney's and comparable to that of Sánchez. A significant majority of Lyons' teachers were white, with Hispanics and African Americans accounting for most of the rest of the teaching faculty (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2002/campus.srch.html).

**Students**

Although the purpose of my interviews and observations was investigating participating teachers' understandings, beliefs, and practices regarding reading instruction for English-language learners with learning disabilities, the students in these teachers' classrooms provided the context for understanding and interpreting teachers' conversations. Thus, though students were not active participants in the study in that I did not interview or interact with students on other than a very superficial level, I observed students to help me achieve a deeper understanding of the teachers' experience.

I observed the reading instruction provided to all Spanish-speaking students, regardless of whether I had access to folder information, on the premise that my having access to folder information did not affect the instruction provided to these students by the classroom teacher. I focused on the Spanish-speaking students' responses to

instruction and took note of teachers' interactions with them. From the pool of English-language learners in participating teachers' reading and/or language arts classes that I observed, I was able to secure permission from the families of 14 students to review their child's special education folder. Data pertaining to two of the 14 students were later disregarded, since the students' folders indicated they were not identified as LEP by the District. Six of these 12 target students were in grade 6, five were in grade 7, and one student was in grade 8. The most recent LEP status designation of the 12 students, as reported in their folders, is reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Most Recent Limited English Proficient (LEP) Status Designation

| LEP status | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| A low-level reading and writing skills, limited listening and speaking skills | 1 | 8% |
| B low-level reading and writing skills high-level ("proficient") listening and speaking skills | 3 | 25% |
| C mid-level reading and writing skills mid-level ("limited") listening and speaking skills | 2 | 17% |
| D mid-level reading and writing skills high-level ("proficient") listening and speaking skills | 6 | 50% |

(Del Vecchio & Guerrero, 1995, Language Assessment Scales)

The folder review revealed that the home language of virtually each of these 12 students was reported to be Spanish. Eleven of the 12 students were of Mexican descent,

while one boy's family was from a Central American country. The information in most of the folders, though not complete, allowed me to piece together a picture of these students' schooling history in terms of language of instruction as well as the grade at which the student had been identified for special education services. I have grouped a student who first qualified for services due to illness (but in grade 5 qualified as LD) with the others who qualified as LD in the 5th grade.

Table 3: Grade at Which Student was Identified for Special Education

| **Grade** | **n** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| 1-2 | 4 | 33% |
| 3-4 | 4 | 33% |
| 5-6 | 4 | 33% |

The folders of two of the 12 students documented some schooling in Mexico. Specifically, one student had lived in Mexico and attended 1st grade there before moving to the US, while another had moved back and forth between the US and Mexico, where he had experienced "sporadic schooling." The folder review revealed that frequent moving back and forth between countries appeared to influence retention rates. Two other folders did not contain complete information for schooling; information about schooling previous to the 5th grade for one student and previous to the 3rd grade for the other was missing. The teacher of the former student indicated this student had moved to the United States at the age of four. However, it was impossible to ascertain in the educational records whether either student had attended schooling in Mexico.

Focusing on the education these students received in the United States, the folder review revealed that eleven of the 12 students had received some or all of their elementary schooling in bilingual general and/or bilingual special education programs, as follows: 50% of the 12 students (n=6) had 5 to 6 years of bilingual education; 25% (n=3) had 3 to 4 years (information for one of these students is lacking prior to grade 3, so this student may have had more than 3-4 years); and 17% (n=2) had between 1-2 years of bilingual education (information for one student is lacking prior to grade 5; she was placed in a bilingual program upon entry in the District in grade 5, so she may have had more than the 1-2 years documented in the paperwork). The language of instruction for the early schooling of the remaining student, whose mother had denied permission to place her son in a bilingual special education program when he first qualified for special education services in grade 5, is unclear.

Once a disability had been identified in these 12 students, eight students began receiving bilingual special education (BSE) services, and seven of them stayed in the BSE program from the time of identification (grades 1-5, as presented in Table 4) through the last year in most elementary schools in the District, grade 5. As noted earlier, bilingual special education had been denied by the parents of one student. The four students who had no history of enrollment in a bilingual *special* education program tended to be referred for special education assessment and identified late in their elementary schooling: One student was identified for services in grade 6, and three in the spring of their 5th grade. The total years of bilingual *special* education services is presented in Table 4.

It should be noted that bilingual general education, and to an even greater extent, bilingual special education services in the District where the study was conducted are provided at a limited number of elementary campuses. Parents of a child whose special

education committee—the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee—concluded that a student required bilingual education to benefit from instruction, but whose neighborhood schools did not offer these programs, had a sometimes difficult decision to make. Because comparatively few campuses offer bilingual services, students requiring bilingual education often have to leave their neighborhood school and instead be bused to the nearest campus that has these services available, provided the parents give permission for their child to do so.

Table 4: Total Years of Bilingual Special Education Services

| **Years** | **n** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | 4 | 33% |
| 1-2 | 3 | 25% |
| 3-4 | 4 | 33% |
| 5-6 | 1 | 8% |

Students' Individual Educational Plans (IEP), a key document in the educational folders, detailed the educational goals established for the current year by the special education case manager and. For more than half of the target students, the goals and testing levels reported here reflect decisions made by their special education case manager in spring of the year before. The other students' goals and testing levels had been established at ARDs held during the year of the study, specifically, 1 in November

of 2001, and 2 each in February and March of 2002. Goals in the areas of reading and/or language arts presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Reading and Language Arts Areas Addressed in IEP Goals 2001-2002

| Area | n | % |
|---|---|---|
| Comprehension | 9 | 75% |
| Decoding/Word Recognition | 7 | 58% |
| Fluency | 2 | 17% |
| Spelling | 5 | 42% |
| Vocabulary | 1 | 8% |
| Writing | 10 | 83% |

**Teachers**

The educators who taught reading to children fitting the study criteria and who were willing to participate in this investigation were all special education teachers. The five teachers who agreed to participate were Ms. Constance Bautista, Mr. Robert LeBlanc, Ms. Ann Janiak, Ms. Carol Reinhart, and Ms. Ellen Schmidt; pseudonyms are used to protect their confidentiality. Most were experienced special education teachers, though 4 out of 5 had been teaching reading for only a few years. The four women

participants were in their 40s while Mr. LeBlanc was in his 30s. Demographic data for the five teachers are presented in Table 6 (see Appendix F for Demographic Questionnaire).

Table 6: Participants' Background Information

| | **Ms. Janiak** | **Ms. Reinhart** | **Mr. LeBlanc** | **Ms. Bautista** | **Ms. Schmidt** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Factors* | Sánchez | | McKinney | | Lyons |
| Ethnicity | W | W | W | PI | W |
| Special Ed Certification Program | 4-year | LD Endorse | Altern. | 4-year | 4-year |
| Other Areas of Certification | Elem. Ed. | English | None | Elem. Ed. | Elem. Ed. |
| Highest Degree | BA/BS | BA/BS | BA/BS | BA/BS | BA/BS |
| Total Years of Teaching Experience | 17 | 15 | 2 | 12 | 16 |
| Years of Experience Teaching Reading to Students w/LD in Resource Setting | 10 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |

***Ms. Ann Janiak***

One of two participating teachers working at Sánchez Middle School, Ms. Janiak identified herself as white and between the ages of 40-50. She reported having studied Spanish about 4 years, but acknowledged, "I don't speak it very well.… [The students] end up communicating with me." She indicated she was a beginner in all skill areas of the language. Ms. Janiak is an experienced educator with 15 years of teaching experience, ten of which included reading as part of her teaching assignment. Ms. Janiak is certified to teach students in the general elementary education program in grades 1-6, and students with special needs in grades 1-12. She attended a traditional 4-year university program for her degree. Ms. Janiak reported taking several courses on teaching reading, and "too many to count" specifically related to teaching students with learning disabilities. She reported taking two courses focusing on teaching English-language learners. In addition to teaching students with learning disabilities, she has taught students with mental retardation in a Life Skills program, and, one year, students identified as having Emotionally Disturbance. Ms. Janiak has also taught students in the general education program for 6 years.

Over the three years prior to the study, Ms. Janiak asserted, she had participated in approximately 130 hours of in-service instruction focused on teaching English-language learners, and approximately 60 hours related to teaching students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, she stated that she regularly trained other teachers in the District in the methods used in the Project Read program (Greene & Enfield, 1999) through the District's professional development program. She provided training for the linguistic, writing, and comprehension strands of the Project Read program.

Ms. Janiak's current teaching duties included 7th grade resource English/Language Arts, and she was the inclusion teacher in a science and math

classroom. She reported that she was teaching students with learning disabilities, some with ADHD, and, she noted, "I've got ED kids, mixed in with … these guys. Some with two and three different handicapping [conditions], but … just got to be … flexible."

***Ms. Carol Reinhart***

Ms. Reinhart, the second participant teaching at Sánchez Middle School, identified herself as white and between the ages of 40-50. Her duties at Sánchez included serving as the Special Education Department Chair. In addition to resource reading classes, Ms. Reinhart also taught students with special needs who received science instruction in an inclusive setting. She reported no skills in languages other than English. Ms. Reinhart reported she had attended a traditional 4-year university program and was certified to teach English. She had also earned a teaching endorsement in special education. Ms. Reinhart indicated that she had taken courses on teaching reading and students with learning disabilities, but had no courses focusing on teaching English-language learners. She reported teaching students with disabilities for 17 years, and students in general education for 4 to 5 years. At the time of the study, Ms. Reinhart had been teaching reading for 2 years. Over the previous 3 years, Ms. Reinhart reported attending between 10-15 days of in-service focusing on reading instruction, and another 10-15 days on teaching students with learning disabilities. She reported attending no in-service training focused on teaching English-language learners.

***Mr. Robert LeBlanc***

Mr. LeBlanc identified himself as white, and between the ages of 30-40. He described himself as having beginning skills in Spanish and French, though he indicated during an interview that he cannot speak Spanish with the students. Prior to embarking on his teaching career, he had worked as an illustrator for 8 years.

Mr. LeBlanc had obtained alternative certification in special education for grades K-12 through a local college. He reported having many courses focused on teaching reading, and many more on teaching students with learning disabilities. He indicated he had not taken a course focused on teaching English language learners. Mr. LeBlanc stated that he had worked in the local school District for the 5 years prior to the year of this study, first serving as a long-term substitute, then a teacher aide, and beginning the year previous to the study, as a full-time teacher. He noted, "I've been teaching for about 6 years, but, really, coming up with my own lesson plans and stuff, this is only my second year." The previous year, Mr. LeBlanc's teaching assignment was for resource language arts. The year of the study, his teaching duties included resource reading as well as resource language arts. Mr. LeBlanc indicated he had attended approximately 10 hours of in-service professional development in reading within the past 3 years; he reported having no professional development in teaching English-language learners.

***Ms. Constance Bautista***

One of two participating teachers employed at McKinney Middle School, Ms. Constance Bautista identified herself as between 40-50 years old, and of Pacific Island origin. She indicated she had grown up and spent her young adulthood on a Pacific island that is a territory of the United States. Many people in her community were bilingual in Chamoru, the native language of their ethnic community, and English. Both sets of Ms. Bautista's grandparents were monolingual Chamoru speakers, while her parents were fluent bilinguals. Ms. Bautista described herself as having fluent listening skills in Chamoru, but intermediate speaking and reading skills and only beginning writing skills in the language.

Ms. Bautista graduated from a 4-year university program and earned certification in elementary education (K-6) and special education for grades K-12. She reported taking

many courses on teaching reading and teaching students with learning disabilities, though none of her courses focused on teaching English language learners. She taught in Title I programs for 7 years, 5 years as a teacher's aide in a school on her island.

After teaching for 7 years of teaching on the island, she moved to the U.S. mainland. Her teaching experience in the States includes 2 years with very young students with speech and language delays in a largely bilingual community, followed by 2 years in her current position at McKinney Middle School. Thus, at the time of the study, Ms. Bautista had been teaching for approximately 12 years. Her teaching duties at the middle school during the 2001-2002 school year included primarily 7th grade resource language arts and resource reading. She reported having approximately 6 hours of in-service professional development over the past three years in the area of reading, but no professional development targeting English-language learners.

***Ms. Ellen Schmidt***

Employed at Lyons Middle School, Ms. Schmidt described herself as white and between the ages of 40-50. Ms. Schmidt reported taking a very basic class in Spanish the previous summer, but noted, "I wouldn't say I could ever communicate to [students] at this point in Spanish." Ms. Schmidt went through a 4-year special education certification program at a nearby university. She is certified to teach students with special needs in all grade levels. Ms. Schmidt is a seasoned special education teacher with 16 years experience in the field. Much of her experience was in teaching youngsters with speech and language delays; she had also taught math for 1 year, and, at Lyons Middle School, she was in her third year of teaching resource reading and resource English/Language arts. At first, Ms. Schmidt indicated that before coming to Lyons Middle School 3 years ago, she had had no experience in teaching English-language learners. When I asked her about this, she reconsidered, stating:

> Well, I probably did, but they were 3-year olds and 4-year olds, and they weren't established in any language, really. Language was their … biggest deficit.… The concepts behind the language, as well.… A lot of their problems were speech problems.… Impediment problems, too.

Ms. Schmidt indicated that while she had not had any courses specifically focused on the teaching of reading, reading methods had been included in her teaching methods courses as an undergraduate student. She reported taking many courses on teaching students with learning disabilities. She had not, she reported, had a course focused on teaching English-language learners. Over the past 3 years, she indicated participating in 12-15 days of professional development in the area of reading and approximately 6 days of in-service on matters related to teaching students with learning disabilities. She stated she had not had any professional development in the area of teaching English-language learners.

This group of five educators working in the three school settings just described agreed to participate in interviews about their knowledge and beliefs regarding teaching reading to EL learners and to allow me into their classrooms to observe their teaching and classroom practices. In order to allow participants' voices to be clearly heard, care was taken with the methods selected to generate and collect primarily the educators' perceptions and understandings about the focus of inquiry, as described next, with the understanding that methods cannot be permitted to distance the researcher from the human interactions at the core of constructivist research (Erlandson et al., 1993).

**Emergent Active Interviews**

Interviews and observations were the primary means of learning about teachers' knowledge and beliefs regarding reading instruction for English-language learners with LD and of discovering how teachers' knowledge and beliefs were reflected in their

instructional decisions and practices for these students in their classes. I created a semi-structured interview guide that would invite teachers to talk about topics relevant to the focus of the inquiry (See Appendix E).

In conducting a research study from within the constructivist paradigm, I dialogued with my participants and, through interacting with them, arrived at co-constructions of (a) the teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of and factors contributing to the learning disabilities in their EL learners, (b) the teachers' understanding of what constitutes good reading instruction for these students, (c) how these understandings and beliefs are reflected in the teachers' current reading instruction and practices, as well as (d) the challenges and successes they have experienced in teaching reading to middle school English-language learners who have learning disabilities in reading. My primary means of probing the educators' knowledge, beliefs, practices, and experiences regarding the issues that surround their reading instruction practices and, hence, of generating data, was a series of tape-recorded, 'active' emergent interviews with each participating educator in the study. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) stated, "Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning nor merely transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. … Respondents are … constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers." (p. 4, emphasis added). In this way, the participants and I arrived at an understanding of the phenomena through dialogic interactions in the social setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Furthermore, an active interviewer is not restricted to a predetermined agenda, but "engages the respondent, working interactionally to establish the discursive bases from which the respondent can articulate his or her relevant experiences" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 47). As the interviewer, I was free to probe topics raised by

participants to arrive at a better understanding of their perspectives on the focus of the inquiry, thus allowing the participants' notions of what constitutes relevant information to emerge. These interviews were instrumental in "help[ing me] the researcher to understand and put into a larger context the interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the environment" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 85)—in this case, the context and circumstances in which instructional decisions related to reading instruction for EL learners with LD in reading are made.

I provided teachers with a demographic questionnaire prior to or at the time of each initial interview for teachers to record their educational and professional history, including previous teaching experience and the kinds of training or professional development each has had, e.g., training in reading methods, in-service hours in teaching English-language learners, professional development opportunities in special education methods, etc. (See Appendix B). I conducted three semi-structured interviews with 4 of the 5 participants, each from 45-110 minutes in length, and I was able to talk briefly with most teachers on a less structured basis either before or after several of the observations, depending on schedules and teachers' willingness. The first interview with Carol Reinhart did not record correctly, which necessitated using the second interview slot with her to pose my initial interview questions again, in addition to conducting member checking. Due to time constraints, this participant was not able to meet with me for the third interview, in which the final interview member checking was normally completed. Instead, we conducted the member checking for the third interview on paper: I provided Ms. Reinhart with written summaries of my understanding of her responses to the questions, and she mailed me back her written clarifications and feedback.

All interviews were audio-taped. Initial interviews began with a brief review of the background information teachers had provided on the demographic questionnaire to

be sure I understood the information. Then I asked three questions in turn designed to identify the focus of my inquiry. These questions were open-ended in nature so as not to restrict participants' range of responses, and I provided talking points with each question, as needed, to encourage participants to talk freely. The questions and talking points are as follows: a) What do you know and/or believe about "good" reading instruction for English-language learners with LD? (What would it look like/include?), b) What do you know and/or believe about the nature of the reading difficulties exhibited by your EL learners with LD? (Describe areas of need; What factors do you think have contributed to what you are seeing, etc.), and c) How do you describe your own reading instruction for EL learners with LD in reading? (What does your instruction include/look like? What do you think about when planning a lesson?) I also asked a fourth question designed to identify the elements or factors teachers would talk about as a success they've experienced or, on the other hand, a barrier or challenge they've encountered in teaching reading to EL learners with LD. This question was: What have been your challenges and successes in teaching reading to English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading?

As I took part in interviews with participants, I allowed them to lead the discussion to the extent they appeared comfortable; when participants appeared reticent to respond or provided very succinct answers, I rephrased my question and/or probed for elaboration to help me better understand their position. As the dialogue unfolded, I asked additional questions that arose from information and insights they shared about a topic rather than adhering to a pre-determined sequence of questions. As I learned more about each participant's beliefs and understandings regarding each of my interview questions, I was able to pose more informed follow-up questions. For example, when Ms. Bautista explained her statement that she did not think she taught English language learners by

commenting, “I thought of ‘English-language learners’ as ESLs. And I’ve never taught ESL,” this prompted me to ask her the following two questions to further explore her experience and her thinking in this area:

- Have you ever taught a student who was enrolled in ESL at the same time as in your classroom? If so, how would you describe your instruction (and his learning)?
- When you hear that a child was exited from ESL last year, for example, what does that mean to you in terms of what you can expect from him in the classroom and in terms of the kind of instruction you’ll provide?

After each interview I listened to the audiotape recording and developed written summaries of my understanding of participants’ responses to the questions posed during the interview. To prepare for member checking, I typed a document containing each interview question followed by selected quotations of teachers’ actual replies and comments followed by the summaries; my purpose in including selected quotations was to allow the teachers to see how I had arrived at my interpretation. These summary sheets were shared with participants during the second interview. Second interviews served two purposes. The first purpose was to member-check my understanding of participant’s responses and comments and thus ensure that participants concurred with my interpretation of their statements and positions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was an important means of providing teachers an opportunity to clarify their response as well as to correct any misconstruction of their position on my part. During one such member-check, for example, a participant corrected my interpretation that she did not see the point of “discriminating” (her term) based on the LD or EL learner status, clarifying that although she had not discriminated earlier in the year, there may be a time when such discrimination was called for.

After checking my interpretation of teachers' perspectives on a question, I pursued the second purpose of the second interviews, which was to ask teachers to elaborate about elements and topics to which they had alluded earlier as well as to ask follow-up questions that I had as a result of the teachers' responses in the initial interview. For example, one teacher raised the issue of limited special education personnel on his campus; I probed this topic further to learn if or how he linked the limited number of special education teachers to instruction for EL learners in a subsequent interview. I thus explored with participants further the tentative relationships among data that had emerged during initial interviews

Finally, near the conclusion of the active portion of the study I met with participants a third time to afford them the opportunity to reflect on the responses they had made with regard to the focus of the inquiry during the first and second interviews and during our more informal conversations. Similar to procedures followed after the first interview, a document presenting the questions (including follow-up questions), quotations and summaries of topics discussed during the second interview was shared with teachers to facilitate member checking. This final interview was a further opportunity for teachers to expand on or modify their comments after the experience of participating in the study. The length of time between first and second interviews ranged from 12 to 40 days (M=25 days), and the time between 2nd and 3rd interviews ranged from 11 to 30 days (M=17).

**OBSERVATIONS**

Over the course of the study, I observed the teaching and learning environments in the classrooms where participating educators provided reading instruction to English-language learners with LD in reading. Observations in the classroom were conducted to afford me first-hand experience with the contexts in which the participants' instructional

decisions were taken. Observations additionally functioned as a means of triangulating the information provided in interviews with the teachers, and, in the case of Ms. Janiak, what was contained in her lesson plans. I conducted from five to 19 observations per teacher, which occurred over a span of from 10 to 19 school days. I observed a context until I achieved an understanding of the teacher's reading instruction, including the curriculum as well as methods employed. I observed each targeted class until I was seeing the same types of activities and patterns of interactions recurring in a regular manner, thereby achieving data saturation. Classrooms in which Corrective Reading constituted the reading curriculum required fewer observations to reach an understanding of how reading was taught than classrooms where other, less scripted methods were employed.

Thirty-two of the total 52 observations occurred in resource reading classes, while the remaining 20 were conducted in resource language arts classes. Observations totaled approximately 43 hours, averaging 50 minutes each; on most occasions I was present as students filed in to the classroom and remained, observing, until they filed out. I observed Ms. Bautista's 7th grade resource reading class and Ms. Reinhart's 6th grade resource reading class. I was able to observe the instruction of three participants in two or more settings: Ms. Schmidt's two reading classes (one 6th grade, the other 7th) as well as her 7th grade language arts class; Ms. Janiak's two 7th grade resource English/Language Arts (ELA) classes; and one of Mr. LeBlanc's 6-8th grade resource reading and his 6th grade ELA classes.

During observations, I took detailed notes about instructional activities, the classroom structure, and student-teacher interactions and communications, and recorded these along with my impressions in my observational field notes. An except from field notes demonstrating the teacher's efforts to scaffold for an EL learner is as follows:

*Elena [EL learner] volunteers and writes this word on the board: ch-ark.*
*Teacher gently asked her, "What word?" Elena looks shy, says, "I don't know."*
*Teacher prompted her to acknowledge that she was going for SH-ARK.*
*Teacher erases the c, asks, "What letter do I need? "S," a student says.*
*Teacher: "Right. There's no /sh/ in Spanish, right?"*

Following observations, depending on schedules and my perception of a given teacher's willingness, I talked with teachers in a general manner about the instruction and activities I had observed, and, in particular, what I had observed regarding the EL learners with LD in the classrooms with whose IEPs I was familiar. Questions arising from my observations were thus posed during informal chats after class or during subsequent interviews.

This extended, engaged inquiry allowed me to perceive the multiple realities of participants (Erlandson et al., 1993), though, as Guba and Lincoln stated, "[E]lements are often shared among many individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206). Thus, although each of us, because of our specific life experiences and beliefs, perceives a somewhat different reality, many times aspects of our own perceptions of reality will overlap with or approximate the perceptions of others, and through discussion and communication may come close to converging with others' realities. Indeed, Guba and Lincoln (1998) indicate that the "final aim [of the research project] is to distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions" (p. 207), which incorporates the perceptions of the researcher as well as those of the participants. Throughout the collection of data, these and other field notes to allowed me to provide a thick description (Erlandson et al., 1993) of the context as well as of the interrelationships among factors and participants to assist the reader of this study in determining the transferability of the findings, that is, the applicability of the study's findings to other contexts or to other participants (Lincoln & Guba, as cited in Erlandson et al., 1993).

## DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

### Student Documents

To provide a more defined focus to the classroom observations, I sought access to the educational records of all EL learners with LD in reading in each of the participating educators' classrooms. I was eventually able to secure permission to review the special educational folders of 14 EL learners with learning disabilities. As indicated earlier, the students were not participants in the study; rather, their educational histories and IEPs provided me a point of reference in understanding classroom instruction. Students' special education folders, often between one and two inches thick, were repositories of a diverse assortment of papers and forms documenting students' educational and/or assessment history.

For a variety of reasons, not all folders had complete records. Indeed, documents pertaining to other students in the district were found on at least three occasions mixed among the records of my target students. Nonetheless, I examined the documents available, and attempted to piece together a picture of the students' schooling, both in terms of program and language as well as in terms of whether the student had attended school in Mexico. I paid particular attention to the description of past educational placement (e.g., general education versus special education; bilingual program of instruction versus English); the grade at which the student had first been identified with a disability as well as when the student had transitioned from bilingual reading instruction to English; and any comments previous teachers had noted concerning language or reading.

Thus, the special educational folder information, presented previously in Tables 2-5, allowed me to piece together with varying degrees of completeness those 12

students' previous schooling history. Furthermore, as students receiving special education services, each of these 12 EL learners with LD had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), a legally binding document that delineates educational goals and objectives created for each student by a special education teacher with input and the agreement of the family. I took notes on the current goals for each of the 12 students that had been established in the area of reading and language arts, which helped me understand the observed classroom instruction and practices.

**Teacher Lesson Plans**

Although I had requested a copy of lesson plans from participating teachers so that I could look at how teachers represented lesson content and activities, I was not able to take advantage of this avenue of learning about teachers' instructional practices for four of the five teachers. Ms. Janiak, resource language arts teacher at Sánchez Middle School, regularly submitted lesson plans to her principal, and willingly provided me with copies of lesson plans for six nonconsecutive weeks. This allowed me to see examples of the instruction and activities she had planned towards the beginning of the year (1 week in late September), the middle (the week before and a week shortly after the winter break), mid-spring (a week in March), and two weeks in April, which included a portion of the time I was in the classroom conducting observations. The lesson plans provided confirming evidence of her implementation of the VAKT approach Ms. Janiak had indicated was the best way to teach reading to EL learners with LD. The three teachers using the Corrective Reading Program in their classes all stated, as will be discussed later, that no lesson plans were necessary with this program, as the Teacher's Guide contained ready-made lessons. When I asked Ms. Schmidt for a copy of her lesson plans pertaining to teaching reading, she provided me with her plan for one week's lessons.

## Data Analysis

Consistent with the tradition of qualitative inquiry, the process of analyzing data was ongoing and recursive in this study, a "reflexive activity that … inform[ed] data collection, writing, [and] further data collection." (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 6). I examined the raw interview data, the hand-written descriptive accounts from my observations, and looked for key factors and relationships between and among the data.

### MEMBER CHECKING

The practice of member checking provides participants with the opportunity to verify or, to the contrary, to disconfirm any of my interpretations and conclusions regarding participants' positions on issues, themes, or working hypotheses (Erlandson et al., 1993; Manning, 1997) I see emerging. Member checking is an important means to demonstrate the credibility of the findings in this study. To ensure the credibility of my findings, I conducted several levels of member checks with the participants: I checked my understanding of what the participants said during the course of each of the three in-person interviews, again after I had summarized my perceptions of their views and of themes that emerged in an interview, and at every meeting participants were invited to confirm or disconfirm my understandings. Specifically, after reviewing the audiotape of an interview, I developed summaries of my understanding of participants' statements and with regard to the interview questions and any other topics that had arisen during the interviews or observations. I shared my perceptions of participants' positions with them during the subsequent interview, and we discussed my interpretations; if I had misunderstood a teacher's position, I asked her or him to help me arrive at a better understanding. Clarifications were made as needed until teachers accepted my understanding as correct.

## CODING AND CATEGORIZING

Interview transcripts were the source of a significant portion of the data in this study. Accordingly, after I transcribed the audiotapes of the first interviews, I examined the transcripts, analyzed each phrase or sentence, and then unitized the data into the smallest individual thoughts that (a) could stand alone and still be meaningful with only a general understanding of the context (Erlandson et al., 1993), and (b) helped illuminate an element of the context under study or suggested a next step for the researcher (Erlandson et al., 1993). Examples of units of data include the following: "takes a while for them to respond," "level of English impacts learning in terms of rate of progress" and "you have one sound, one symbol." Each unit, comprising only one idea, served as an aide to learning, discovery, or problem solving (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Initial units of text were labeled and then, as more units were analyzed, new units were either given the same label or a different label, depending on whether the new unit appeared to pertain to the same topic and to reflect the same feeling or meaning for the participant. Labels for the preceding units were, "response time," "rate of progress," and "sound-symbol system." In this manner, the number of text labels increased. The units were then analyzed with the goal of perceiving links and relationships among them, which lead to the development of data categories. Examples of categories are "student characteristics" and "language-related factors." Categories were defined, and units were reanalyzed to verify to which category each unit belonged. I made copies of any units of text that appeared to illustrate and provide evidence of more than one category at this early point in the analysis so that the text unit was represented in each category into which it fit. As with the first interview, the text of the second and third interviews was reviewed, unitized, labeled, and then categorized. Categories were constantly examined to identify new emergent themes and/or to provide further evidence for existing themes.

## DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER PROFILES

Participating teachers' demographic information as well as his or her professional background are presented very briefly in this chapter. Teacher interviews and classroom observations formed the basis of more in-depth profiles of each educator, presented in Chapter 4. The cornerstone of in-depth teacher profiles is a description of how each teacher taught reading during the 2001-2002 school year and his or her satisfaction with that; other information the teachers shared that appears to have influenced his or her current teaching is described, as well. For example, two teachers talked about their personal history and backgrounds in ways that indicated this information was relevant to the focus of this investigation, and three teachers spoke about the frustrations they experienced in their efforts to provide effective reading instruction before their schools adopted a packaged reading program. Some teachers talked about changes they were considering in their reading instruction for next year; other teachers did not indicate they were considering making any changes to their teaching. The profiles, then, while organized similarly, do not address an identical list of topics; each profile elucidates the uniqueness of the teacher and the teacher's experiences. The teacher profiles are intended to provide the reader with relevant information about each teacher's background and the context in which she taught reading to EL learners with LD. Each profile concludes with a statement by the teacher describing how the teacher perceives his or her own responsibility toward EL learners with LD.

## EMERGING THEMES

The array of categories and attendant text from the interviews and observations were analyzed with the goal of identifying emergent themes for each teacher based on the connections and associations apparent among the categories. Categories and supporting unitized text were laid out on the floor and subsequently arranged into a visual

representation of emergent themes which represented my understanding of how the categories related to one another. This step in the analysis yielded a large graphic representation of my interpretation of each of the informants' constructions related to the themes. An example of a theme was that both student attributes and system-based constraints were perceived as barriers to higher reading outcomes for EL learners with LD. These themes are explored in greater depth in subsequent Chapter V.

## WORKING HYPOTHESES

Working hypotheses, according to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), are propositions, or tentative conclusions, that are pertinent to the specific focus of the study, derived through the findings of the study. To identify overarching working hypotheses across the teachers' experiences, I reviewed the emergent themes for each teacher and then looked at them as a whole, and grouped the themes according to connections I perceived among them. Some of these working hypotheses addressed my research questions, while others caused me to modify one of my research questions. For example, in reviewing the themes that had emerged related to how the teachers perceived the reading disability of their EL Learners with LD, it became evident that focusing solely on the LD was too narrow a lens that did not capture the rich constructions teachers had of their students. Working hypotheses that provided insight into the teaching and learning environment as well as the context for instructional decisions that teachers across the three schools made for theirs with LD elucidated commonalities as well as differences. These working hypotheses are presented in Chapter VI.

## Establishing Trustworthiness

### RESEARCHER AS INSTRUMENT

In constructivist research it is openly accepted that the researcher's beliefs, values, and past experiences will influence both what the researcher takes note of, and how the researcher interprets this information. To make my personal biases and beliefs known to the reader, I wrote a Researcher as Instrument statement, located in Appendix G. The Researcher as Instrument document openly describes my personal history, values, and beliefs, which influence every aspect and process of this study.

### AUDIT TRAIL

To assure that the reader or other interested persons can follow the processes and procedures the researcher followed, constructivist inquiry requires that the researcher document research-related activities and steps taken throughout the research process. To ensure that tenets of constructivist inquiry were upheld in that emergent themes were grounded in the data and were more the respondents' constructions than mine (Manning, 1997), I have provided evidence of the basis for my interpretations and findings in the form of raw interview transcripts and observation notes, peer debriefing notes, evidence of checking interpretations with stakeholders (member checks), and documentation of emerging categories, themes, and hypotheses. In this report of my investigation, quotations excerpted from the audio-taped interviews and summaries of data generated provide confirmability of my interpretations and conclusions. All of this contributes to a paper trail—the "audit trail"—documenting the progression of my thinking from start to finish, thus providing documentation of the *dependability* of the findings, which refers to the consistency of the findings as well as the ability to explain differences in findings that a researcher may find at a different time (Erlandson et al., 1993).

## REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

I took special care to record the reasoning behind any important decisions and changes in thinking or course of action (Erlandson et al., 1993). This was done primarily by creating the *reflexive journal* and the *audit trail*. I maintained a reflexive journal in which I regularly documented my thoughts, feelings, decisions, and actions throughout the study. Some excerpts of entries are as follows:

> (1) *Where should I mention Schmidt's reference to twins, one of whom she had to send to ESL for reading instruction because the consensus was that this child did not have enough English to succeed in her class?[even though she is the SPED teacher] (2) Should I include those few words Ms. Schmidt made in reference to parents' job of looking at their kids' morals???(3) It's a little contradictory or curious at least that Ms. Bautista talked about not being allowed to speak the language of her community (Chamoru) when she was little (talked of being punished), and so regrettably cannot speak it now, yet she discourages the use of Spanish by the Spanish-speakers…Hmm.…*

## PEER DEBRIEFING

Throughout data analysis, I participated in the process of peer debriefing, another means to demonstrate the credibility of this study. Peer debriefing sessions. In peer debriefing sessions, I talked with two to five colleagues knowledgeable about constructivist inquiry as well as the issues affecting the schooling of English-language learners and thus was afforded regular opportunities to share the raw data of my study, verbalize issues and concerns, and share my understandings and interpretations of the concepts, emergent themes, and hypotheses with knowledgeable others (Erlandson et al., 1993; Manning, 1997). Just as important, peer debriefers asked me to substantiate my interpretations and methods, and provided alternate ways of interpreting the data. Discussions about tentative understandings, methods, and concerns occurring during my peer debriefing sessions were documented and these notes and/or audiotapes were referred to as I reflected on, analyzed, and reanalyzed the data.

## TRIANGULATION OF DATA

By interviewing a variety of middle school teachers who teach reading to English-language learners with reading disabilities, by observing classroom instruction and interactions, and by examining the educational records of several children from the target group, I incorporated different methods of data triangulation. Data triangulation, through which the researcher "seeks out several different types and sources of data that can provide insights about the same events or relationships" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 115) is, according to Erlandson et al., (1993) one of the best ways to access the different constructions of reality maintained by the different stakeholders in a study, and thus to demonstrate credibility of findings. To achieve triangulation of data, I purposively recruited a range of teachers who work with EL Learners with reading disabilities from three different middle schools, and incorporated a range of methods to collect data. This assured me of a variety of perspectives on the focus of the inquiry. The triangulation helped me to achieve a deeper and broader understanding of the context.

## AUTHENTICITY OF THE FINDINGS

According to Adler and Adler (1998, p. 88), a study's authenticity is demonstrated when "written accounts contain a high degree of internal coherence, plausibility, and correspondence to what readers recognize from their own experiences and from other realistic and factual texts." Guba and Lincoln (1998, p. 213) hold that authenticity encompasses the following:

1. Fairness.
2. Ontological authenticity (enlarges participants' personal constructions).
3. Educative authenticity (leads to participants' improved understanding of others' constructions).
4. Catalytic authenticity (stimulates participants to action).

5. Tactical authenticity (encourages action on participants' part).

Fairness, the only authenticity criterion under my control as the researcher, pertains to the representation of informants' voices (Manning, 1997). Fairness was maintained in this study via the re-presentation of each informant's constructions in the final product, regardless of whether other informants raised similar issues. Fairness occurs, in part, when the constructions of all stakeholders are brought out in as open and balanced a manner as possible (Erlandson et al., 1993; Manning, 1997). In addition, informed consent, another key aspect of fairness, was obtained prior to the initial interview, when I explained the purpose of the inquiry and the nature of the process that constructivist inquiry entails.

Though other types of authenticity are hoped for as a result of an educator's experience of participating in this research, none is under the control of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). These demonstrations of authenticity may or may not be observed in the findings of this study. In this study, I believe catalytic authenticity was obtained in that Mr. LeBlanc made comments such as, "You're the first person who's ever asked me these questions. I never had to consider that before," and he reported that since I had first asked him about monitoring student growth in reading, he has "been paying attention a little bit more." Such statements implied that my questions and focus on issues related to EL learners had prompted him in turn to reflect more on his EL students.

The case studies, themes, and working hypotheses identified may prove interesting to a range of stakeholders. The report of findings may be of use to a wide variety of readers who are interested in the education of English-language learners, including but not limited to those whose primary interest is as:

1. Middle school administrators who are responsible for campus-based decisions and policies, in addition to seeing that federal legislation regarding special education and English-language learners is correctly carried out.

2. Teacher educators with the responsibility of identifying critical knowledge and skill areas and for training our future middle school teachers in the identified areas.

3. Middle school special educators who are currently employed in a district or area where the population of English-language learners is growing and therefore changing the demographics of the school and the students in their classes.

4. Middle school general education teachers on a campus with an increasing enrollment of English-language learners.

5. Middle school reading teachers/reading specialists responsible for the reading instruction of students with identified LD in reading and/or those who, for whatever reason(s), need more individualized instruction in reading.

6. Middle school ESL teachers who find that they, like their general education colleagues, are assuming increasing responsibility for the education of students with identified special needs.

7. Parents of language minority middle school students who have a disability.

8. Parent liaison staff members who work in middle schools with a growing population of English-language learners.

9. Community members who are interested in improving the educational experience of language minority students, including a desire to see a decrease in the dropout rate.

10. Policymakers on a broader scale who, like community members, are concerned with improving the academic experience and achievement of this nation's increasing population of English-language learners.

Scholarly literature in the field of bilingual special education is extensive in theory, but limited in terms of empirical data. The working hypotheses resulting from this study may provide insight into the challenges of providing reading instruction to middle school English-language learners who have LD in reading. The knowledge, beliefs, and experiences these teachers share highlighted particular skills, attitudes, and knowledge they perceived beneficial and necessary for effective reading instruction for this population. In the next chapter, teacher portraits are presented that allow the reader to achieve an understanding of the background and experiences of each teacher to the extent that this information was both shared and seemed to influence or, alternatively, to illuminate the focus of this study.

# CHAPTER IV: TEACHER PORTRAITS

The purpose of presenting portraits of participating teachers is twofold. The first is to present elements in the teachers' personal backgrounds and prior teaching experiences that shed light on the teacher's beliefs and knowledge of appropriate reading instructional practices for English-language learners with learning disabilities. The second purpose is to provide a detailed description of each teacher's teaching context and instructional practices implemented at the time of the study, presented both in the teachers' own language as well as from my perspective as an observer of that instruction. Each teacher is presented in turn.

## Ms. Ann Janiak

Sánchez Middle School was one of several middle schools around the Greenriver district that had adopted the Corrective Reading program (CR) (Engelmann, Hanner, & Johnson, 1999) in the fall of the 2001-2002 academic year as its reading curriculum for students reading significantly below grade level. Students at Sánchez who had failed the state-wide assessment the previous year had accordingly been assessed early in the fall of the year of the study, and many students' schedules had been changed subsequently in order to facilitate homogeneous grouping for the students with very low reading skills. Those teachers assigned the lowest-skilled groups of readers at Sánchez had then begun teaching the Corrective Reading program, while those teaching students with skills closer to grade level continued with their own curriculum. Teachers providing reading instruction to students receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) services also began implementing the CR program. Ms. Ann Janiak was among those teachers continuing with her program.

## ESL BACKGROUND AND PRIOR TEACHING EXPERIENCES

In reviewing the demographic questionnaire that Ms. Janiak completed, I was struck by the extensive amount of in-service training Ms. Janiak reported that had focused on teaching English-language learners. Ms. Janiak explained that, a few years prior to coming to Sánchez Middle School, she had taught at McKinney Middle School (where participants Ms. Bautista and Mr. LeBlanc taught the year the study took place). She related that as part of an ESL grant initiative launched at that time, all teachers at McKinney had been required by the principal (who was no longer at McKinney Middle School at the time of the study) to attend after-school in-service training on ESL techniques for about 30 minutes, three days a week, throughout the entire school year. "That was when they were trying to get, they wanted me certified in ESL," she related.

Upon learning this, I mentioned the initiative posted on McKinney's website indicating that the teachers are required to be certified in ESL. "Certified!" She exclaimed. She then explained a little bit about the initiative and the principal's vision for his staff. "[They] wanted everybody [certified], and I said, 'Hmmm, No!' 'Cause they wanted to open up an ESL Special Ed [program]. I said, 'No.'" She informed me, on the heels of this statement, of another mandate her principal had imposed on her before the ESL initiative, and her reaction to being put in that position. "He had me teach ED [students with the qualifying disability of emotional disturbance] one year, without asking me. 'You will teach ED.' Oh, yeah? I think I'm sick! [laugh]." Thus, within the space of a few years at McKinney, Ms. Janiak had experienced principal directives that had impacted her teaching assignment and/or which had had the potential to change her teaching assignment without her desire to do so.

I asked Ms. Janiak to talk more about the ESL initiative at McKinney. She clarified, "Initially, when they received that grant, they said 70% of the staff would be certified in ESL." She recounted her response to the initiative as follows:

> I said, that's fine, I don't mind being trained in ESL.… But it was really hard, that's when I come back to Special Ed [motions to one place], and ESL [motioning a different place]. You would think they'd be very similar, but …. There are some similar strategies, but the … concept … the … whole background, is different.

After the year-long training, Ms. Janiak subsequently took the certification exam, but described the difficulty she experienced: "On that [state certification] test, I was going, huh!–I'm thinking, Special Ed. [But] Oh, oh! I'm [draws her hand horizontally across her throat], you know, and … so I just [laugh] … like, Whoops!! This is not SpEd!" Thus, Ms. Janiak indicated she had approached the ESL certification test through the lens of a special educator, which is a different framework than that appropriate for teaching ESL to students without disabilities. As a result, Ms. Janiak was not successful in her efforts to earn certification in ESL.

Ms. Janiak indicated that at the end of that year, she and many other McKinney teachers transferred to other schools within the District. She related:

> Unfortunately, [the principal] ran off a lot of the teachers that did the training.… In fact, we had 80% turnover. And, these were some master teachers. These were good teachers.… They would have done well without the training because they gave [Sally Johnson] ideas, and she's head of our ESL [program] at Greenriver.

Ms. Janiak transferred to Sánchez Middle School. Here at Sánchez, Ms. Janiak related how she helps both the special education students and the ESL students in her inclusion math and science classes, reflecting her interest and willingness to help both groups of students succeed, regardless of her ESL experience at McKinney. She stated:

> What we've tried to do is, so that I help with the ESL and the special ed[ucation], I look at where … densities are, and I try to hit them both at the same time. I figure'd I'd help both the [groups of] kids.… I'm scheduled in there for my Special Ed [students]. But I make sure that I help [the EL learners].… [Teachers with EL learners] usually find me. So, I do both.

Ms. Janiak indicated she has been teaching Project Read (Greene & Enfield, 1999) for many years. Project Read, according to its website, is "a research-based language arts program" that "honors diverse learning profiles and provides curricula with lessons built on direct concept teaching, multi-sensory processing, systematic instruction and higher level thinking skills" (2006, ¶1). Ms. Janiak had first begun using the program when she was teaching students in a Life Skills program. She related, "I was tired of just … the redundancy of the Edmark (1992) [program], and … I knew some of these kids were very capable." She noted, "I saw gains … when I used the Project Read." She continued, "I had a couple MR kids reading on 3rd grade level. Which was, just like … 'You're ready for resource [classes], Go!'" She added:

> And I … looked at that one kid, and I said, "You're working … at 150% of your potential." And she was. She was working at more than 100%. I mean, she just completely floored me. So, I … really like the … methodology that they use with Project Read.… I really like the process and the strategy that they teach in Project Read. I really do.

Ms. Janiak explained that the Edmark (1992) program teaches reading through "the picture-word association. That's something for the really really, really low kids." With the success of her students with mental retardation in the Project Read curriculum, she became convinced of the effectiveness of the program.

Furthermore, Ms. Janiak indicated that the Project Read approach has "been proven." She elaborated, "I've done some longitudinal studies with it.… We did what's called Action Research for 3 years … for our evaluation. It was something that Greenriver I.S.D. was trying." Ms. Janiak continued, "And so I've got a lot of

documentation that … this works.… Kids make gains. And that's with the regular middle school, with … myself and another teacher, and it worked." I asked Ms. Janiak if the students in the study included those with learning disabilities. She replied in the affirmative, asserting, "LD, ESL—we did a whole ESL pilot thing.… We did a … longitudinal study. And we did give up one conference period to see if the ESL group would make some gains. And we took the real high need … intense kids. [And] we kept it real small, at about … 11 or 12 kids." Satisfied that Project Read was effective with the students that she taught, Ms. Janiak has been teaching it since that time.

## TEACHING READING AT SÁNCHEZ MIDDLE SCHOOL

Ms. Janiak teaches language arts in a room that she shares with Mr. Paul, a special education teacher who also teaches students with LD who have skills within a few years of grade level. When one teacher is teaching language arts in the room, the other is teaching inclusion in another area of the building or has his/her planning and conference periods.

### The Classroom Context

In the large, rectangular room the two teachers share, each has a teacher's desk, located across the room from each other. As one enters the room, eyes sweeping from left to right, there is a closet and then a bank of computers along the wall to the left that continues around the corner. Positioned in the area of that corner is Ms. Janiak's desk. Further along this wall, which forms the back of the room, bookshelves are positioned a few feet out from the wall to form a barrier; a few student desks are tucked behind the bookshelf, creating a quiet place for a student to focus on his or her work. In the far corner, located diagonally opposite the door, Mr. Paul's desk sits a few feet out from where the back wall of the room abuts the outside wall, which has several windows

facing the outdoors. A large round table and a smaller rectangular table occupy the space adjacent to the windowed wall. A glass rectangular fish tank close to the windows holds some branches and butterfly cocoons. Finally, the wall forming the front of the room supports a large chalkboard, which is often partially covered by an overhead screen. At the end of the front wall, close to the door leading to the hallway, is a double set of wooden doors that allow entry to the adjacent classroom; these typically remain closed. Centered in front of the screen, perched on top of a small stand placed in the front row of student desks, is an overhead machine. Rows of student desks, all facing the front, fill the center area of the room.

**The Classroom Community**

I observed two of Ms. Janiak's language arts classes. The first class had 9 students, of who approximately one third were Latino, one third were white, and the remaining few students were African American and Asian. The second class I observed had about the same number of students, with approximately equal proportions of whites, Latino, and African American students. Believing that four or five of her Latino students met the criteria for participation in the study, Ms. Janiak gave permission slips to these students for the study. When none came back after a week, she asked for a few additional permission slips, which were provided. Ms. Janiak reported that one student had returned a signed permission slip, but it was not located. The end of the school year was fast approaching, Ms. Janiak had decided to teach in a different school the following year and was therefore busy with packing up supplies and materials for the move, and it was not possible to secure permission again from this student. As a result, I did not review the educational folders of the EL learners in Ms. Janiak's classes, and hence, I cannot report students' IEP goals or testing levels. Regardless, these students were part of the classes in

which I observed Ms. Janiak's reading instruction. I asked Ms. Janiak what level the students were currently reading on. She reflected a moment and stated, "I've got two … that came to me … on a primer level." She added, "They have made, minimum, the kids have made one year gain. I've had some kids that have made 2, 3, and 4 year gains." She stated the following about students' levels:

> Most of my kids, they're probably [at] 4th, [on] average, if I were to take an average. Probably 4th [grade]. I've got a couple [at] 3rd, I've got a couple [at] 5th, I've got a couple that are [higher]. I've got one little kiddo, he'll be moving out in[to] regular [English Language Arts]. He made four years' gain.

**Teacher's Perceptions of Students' Language**

The language characteristics of the students in one's room might be expected to influence the instruction and methods a teacher would implement to teach reading; therefore I asked each teacher to talk about his or her perceptions of students' English language abilities. It should be noted here that, though Ms. Janiak worked with English-language learners with and without disabilities in her role as an inclusion teacher in math, the students spoken of in this profile refer to her EL learners with LD, unless explicitly stated otherwise. I asked Ms. Janiak to talk about her impression of her EL Learners' conversational English skills. "They've got a pretty good … grasp," she asserted. I asked about her students' academic language in English. "They have a hard time reading it, I think.… When you give them oral, they understand a little bit more," she stated. I asked Ms. Janiak how long she thought EL learners with a learning disability needed to acquire academic skills in English so that they are able to read text books at the level expected of them. "It takes a while. It really does," she responded.

Ms. Janiak noted that many teachers at Sánchez had begun presenting English vocabulary terms with a visual representation, which she believes helps EL learners in their learning. "I see a lot of teachers using more parallels with pictures…. Especially in

science. That's a strong one because you've got … the picture, you've got the labels. So there, it pairs. It pairs up." Ms. Janiak continued, "Also, with the science, for our notes … [the teacher has] one side English, one side Spanish. But he … also was one of our student teachers for … part of the ESL initiative." Thus, it appeared that Ms. Janiak attributed the science teacher's ESL-friendly practices to his having been part of an ESL grant initiative. She noted that the science teacher "was at the tail end" of the initiative, and that the teachers in the initiative had decided to pair English text with "T-charts … that kind of things" to help the English-language learners understand written material.

### TEACHER'S KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT "GOOD" READING INSTRUCTION

Regarding instructional practices, Ms. Janiak asserted, "I was always taught that you had to direct teach the skill. That was because I majored in special education." In discussing good reading instruction for EL learners with LD, she began by articulating how reading should be taught, stating, "In the beginning of the year, I do believe in a direct teach approach when you're introducing a new concept. I definitely do." She explained, "With new concepts, I'm not going to have them just try and figure it out. Because if [they] could figure it out, they would have learned to read in second grade, they would have learned to read in third grade." Ms. Janiak continued, "And then I believe in a lot, afterwards, a lot of hands-on." In acknowledgement of EL learners' status as second language learners, Ms. Janiak noted, "You do need a lot of visual, you need to have a basic knowledge for them to go on."

Ms. Janiak spoke about her practice of incorporating review of previously taught materials into her lessons. She asserted, "Go back, review. Because otherwise they'll lose the acquired skill. Immerse the skill you've that you've already taught, that they've mastered, into whatever, so it's a very sequential approach." Thus, Ms. Janiak suggested that frequent review of skills already mastered should be incorporated in subsequent

lessons. She added, “And you really have to task analyze. Whenever I’ve taught something new, I have to go back, I go, Wait a minute. Unh. They didn’t have a strong base in this, and let’s go flow back.” Before Ms. Janiak teaches students a new process or skill, she thinks about whether students have the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the new procedure, and reviews or reteaches any necessary skills she considers lacking or rusty. She explained, “It’s always like two steps forward, make sure you go one step back, and they haven’t forgotten, and then take another couple of steps.” She stated, “So it’s … very sequential.”

In addition to describing the instructional process she employs in teaching, Ms. Janiak spoke about the elements and skills that good reading instruction should include. She stated, “Word ID, being able to decode words.” She continued, “Being able to read a sentence, being able to understand, okay … what is this sentence about—is it a person, place, you know, subject-predicate, that kind of thing. What’s it doing?”

Beyond decoding and comprehension, Ms. Janiak spoke about providing students with “lots of exposure to stories, and stories, and stories,” which she accomplishes in part through teaching students the Story Form curriculum of Project Read. This curriculum teaches students to understand narrative texts through making students explicitly aware of the structural elements of narrative texts such as setting, characters, problem or conflict, the rising action, climax, and the falling action. Ms. Janiak suggested further that good instruction should “have [students] become comfortable with longer passages,” and that the teacher should “use materials that interest the kids, that hook them in.”

Ms. Janiak indicated that towards December, January and February, she turns her focus to teaching students how to read and understand expository text, in an effort to “[get] ready for the [state-wide accountability assessments].” Expository text is taught with the Report Form curriculum from Project Read. Ms. Janiak identified the specific

skills she teaches in this curriculum, including "Being able to … skim, to identify the subject." She makes sure students can predict the number of key facts or main ideas that are going to be in the passage. She spoke about teaching students to locate the supporting details, which she described as "kind of like, your substantiating evidence for that main idea." Ms. Janiak noted that once students can identify the main idea, then that leads them to the summary of the article. She added, "And they learn outlining skills at the same time." In summary, Ms. Janiak indicated that good reading instruction teaches students to identify the subject, find the main ideas, locate supporting details, and how to outline and summarize text.

In an attempt to elicit greater details about Ms. Janiak's understanding of good reading instruction specifically for EL learners with LD, I asked her how she would advise a new teacher who came to her for ideas on how to teach reading to a classroom with some students who are learning English. Ms. Janiak began, "You're going to need consistent structure, consistent application of how to teach." She continued, "You're going to have to start with the very basics," though she suggested the teacher can move fairly quickly, "and if certain kids need to still continue reinforcing sound-symbol … then get them onto a remediation program while the other kids are doing another warm-up." Thus, those who need further practice and reinforcement in decoding should have this available to them, while those who have mastered the sound-symbol system can go forward.

She further advised, "And make sure you know what your … what you want to do in your classroom. Where you're going to go." She noted, "You really have got to do some formal assessment and informal assessment to find out where the gaps are." The assessment will tell the teacher "what target areas you specifically need to address." Ms. Janiak further indicated that reflecting on the day's lesson and analyzing what was

effective and what was not is another element of good reading instruction. She added, "If they're not getting it, go back. Try something different."

Ms. Janiak noted, "It's real difficult to have everybody [together], you know, especially when you have this kind of varying degrees in kids' abilities, to keep them up. But if you teach them the basics, everybody's understood, [and] the kids that are able to do more, will….And the other ones, at least you're giving them success." Thus, Ms. Janiak suggested that providing students with a common base from which to start is beneficial, as this allows the weaker students to begin the year with experiences in which they can achieve success.

## CONTENT AND METHODS OF READING INSTRUCTION

The following is a composite of specific events that occurred over a few days in one or the other language arts classes that Ms Janiak taught.

### Snapshot of Instruction in Language Arts

Before the bell that signals the start of the period has rung, I observe 3 students working at the computers on the Lexia (Lexia Learning Systems, 1997) program. At the sound of the bell, Ms. Janiak distributes the day's warm up, and puts a copy on the overhead. Directions that instruct students to "Decode the following words," and to "Make sure to put the diacritical marks" appear on the overhead screen above the following eight words: *trousers*, *thousand*, *surround*, *plow*, *powerful*, *allow*, *crowd*, and *drowzy* (*sic*) (Ms. Janiak later explained that she had had a student type up many of her warm ups). Ms. Janiak points to the first word and states, "/ou/ and /ow/–What kind of vowel is that?" She and the students mark diphthongs by placing an oval over the two vowels in addition to the usual line underneath used to denote a vowel. At times Ms. Janiak asks a student to decode a word and decide where to put the marks. A boy

struggles to decode *thousand*. Ms. Janiak uses her marker and splits the word after the *ou* on the overhead, and tells students, "We've studied open syllables, [and] closed syllables. This one begins with a /d/—Diphthong!" she tells them. They talk about the meaning of the words as they go along.

With the warm up completed, Ms. Janiak turns students' attention to the next activity. She tells students, "I've been teaching you how to pull facts from expository text, right?—Supporting details, main ideas." Thus she introduces the new kind of text they will be reading. She asks students what is narrative text. A student answers, "A made-up story." Ms. Janiak elicits from students the meaning of terms associated with narrative text, such as *characters*, *setting*, *inciting force*, and the notion of *good guys* and *bad guys*. To illustrate the concept of the good guy versus the bad guy in a story, she uses the analogy of wrestling, saying, "Like an arm wrestle, [the action goes] back and forth." A large poster is displayed in the front that depicts graphically the flow of the four parts of narrative text: an inciting force, leading after a build up to a crisis, which is followed shortly by the climax, and then the falling action unrolls, after which the narrative ends. Ms. Janiak reviews a story she had read them, pausing in between sentences to begin blowing up a balloon. Students' eyes are on the growing balloon as she speaks about the four parts of a narrative story. She shows them the fully-inflated balloon, upon which all eyes are fastened in anticipation. She tells students, "When it gets to the point when something's got to give, you can feel the tension. You can kind of predict what's going to happen." After a pause, she releases the air from the balloon, which quickly deflates. "That's the falling action," Ms. Janiak states. She distributes a piece of candy to everyone.

Ms. Janiak then passes out a summary sheet of the first chapter of the narrative story they will be reading, *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989). She talks with the class

about the places and descriptive statements in the summary sheet: they talk about where Denmark is located, she asks them to imagine what it would be like if they were "on their way to HEB" and they saw "soldiers everywhere," as the narrator in the book describes, and she asks students why they think the narrator said she was safe because she was Protestant. Next Ms. Janiak talks with students about vocabulary words in the summary (e.g., *relocated*, *thwarted*). They talk about the possible usefulness of owning a fishing boat in the war, and talk about the smell of the sea. Ms. Janiak asks the students to predict what might be in the important packet that one of the main characters must obtain in order to make a secret boat passage safe for other characters in the story.

Next, Ms. Janiak passes out a folder to each student, as well as a large sheet of white paper. "I'm going to put up a grading criteria chart. What do you think I would look for in grading?" she asks the students. They suggest some elements to grade on, and she adds, "Neatness." She has a model of how she wants the finished project to look. The model includes eight boxes, each with a heading: Title, Setting, Falling Action, Characters, Climax, Conflict, Rising Action, and Inciting Force. Each box, except the first box for the book's title, includes a symbol underneath the heading (e.g., the symbol for conflict was a circle with a zigzag line running across it). The students work on labeling the headings on their own materials. She tells them they will be reading Number the Stars (1989) by Lois Lowry, and passes out information about the author. They discuss different facts about the author, then the students begin to read the story. Ms. Janiak calls on three or four students to read a few sentences each.

The next day, and on each subsequent day that I observed, Ms. Janiak passes out student copies of the book and plays a taped reading of the story; students are instructed to listen and to follow along in their student copy. She hands out a sheet with four questions about the story, which she reads aloud. She asks students to answer the

questions in sentences. A few students ask her at different times to read one of the questions aloud again, and after the third such request, Ms. Janiak announces, "I'm not going to read these again!" She directs students to illustrate the title page on their sheets, and to start working on filling in information about the setting on their story maps. She tells students to keep their question sheets in their folders. She asks the class about the meaning of "sabotage," a term that they encountered that day in the story.

**Teacher's Description of Reading Instruction in Language Arts**

I asked Ms. Janiak to talk about her reading instruction and classroom practices to teach reading to EL learners with LD. Ms. Janiak said that at the start of the year, she begins with teaching students the sound-symbol system of English and moves on to teaching students to recognize different syllable patterns. She stated, "At the beginning of the year, a lot [of students], especially like Berenice, she's one of my … little ESL kiddos, she … didn't have a whole lot of sound-symbol association going, because it was they *y*'s, the *l*'s." Students then use the syllable patterns to break multisyllabic words apart. She related the following:

> At the beginning of the year, I've done this for like, this will be, coming up, my 10th year [with Project Read], I really want them to get a grasp on the linguistics. … In secondary, I call it linguistics. Elementary, I call it phonology. The sound-symbol association. And just having them look at syllable, syllable, syllable. Because they were good … mono-syllable [decoders], [but] when you get into polysyllabic words … they didn't have a tool to use.

Referring to her warm up activity in which she and the students decode and place diacritical marking on words, she explained, "So, [that's the purpose of] the diagramming that you see.… So that they're able to break the word apart, and blend."

Ms. Janiak reported that Project Read, the program on which her instruction is modeled, teaches seven syllable patterns and diphthongs, which, she noted, are two tools that another popular commercial reading program used in the District does not teach. She

stated, “In REWARDs (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2000), they don’t tell you about the diphthongs.… They just say, ‘Try the long vowel sound. And then, try the other sound.’” She noted, “REWARDs is a syllabic type [of reading program], they take chunk, chunk, chunk, blend. But it doesn’t—if you can’t chunk the word, and you don’t know … the pattern … [students] don’t … have a tool to do it. And Project Read teaches that pattern.”

In addition to teaching students to decode words, Ms. Janiak teaches them to “[be] able to read the sentence, [be] able to understand … What is this sentence about—is it a person, place, you know, the subject-predicate—that kind of thing. What’s [the subject] doing? … [I] make sure to do that.” She stated that after the students have “mastered pretty much [linguistics] … I blend it with the written expression ‘cause I want them to have a basic sentence structure.” Ms. Janiak explained, “There’s a lot of little folder activities where they actually move [parts of] the sentences around to create more complex [sentences], instead of, I call it bare-bones sentences, it’s [creating] more complex sentences.”

Ms. Janiak also teaches students how to read different types of text. She starts students out with short narrative passages, and “we look at place, look [at] heading, locations, all that, setting, where the story is. … I do teach Story Form elements,” she said, referring to the narrative strand of the Project Read approach. She gives students “lots of exposure to stories, and stories, and stories.” She further noted that she uses the “language that they’re going to hear in high school, like interpretive theme, and some of those [terms], ‘cause it … it takes them longer to become familiar with protagonist, antagonist … falling action, crisis, and those words.” Thus, the lesson I observed in which students began reading Number the Stars and discussing features of narrative text such as characters and setting is “a review for [students]—[or] it should be,” stated Ms. Janiak.

She related, "What I've focused on primarily … like the end of December, January, February, [is] getting ready for the [state-wide assessment]." After students have learned how to read narrative text, she said, "We go into Report Form elements, where we're reading critically and pulling out the main point of each paragraph. … . [We look for] the key fact or main point of the paragraph, [and] the supporting detail." I asked Ms. Janiak to explain a little more about Report Form. She asserted the following about Report Form:

> [It] is a methodology to use … for expository text.… It teaches you, basically, skimming to identify the subject of a report.… Once they become proficient at that, then they go through and they … learn to underline the supporting detail. And we call that the key fact or main idea of the paragraph.… I correlate the terms.… The key fact is going to unlock what's in that paragraph, what it's talking about. It unlocks it. And then the supporting detail is kind of like your substantiating evidence for that main idea.

Ms. Janiak added, "If you can get that main idea down, then that gives you the summary of the article." She described this process as "pulling expository text."

Ms. Janiak elaborated on the usefulness of the skills taught in the Report Form strategy. Report Form, she indicated, "is very, very good for reading for detail and it teaches [students] highlighting skills. So that when they go to science and social studies, they'll know what to read … what they're looking for." She added that the process of finding the main idea is "almost like sifting through, finding gold, the gold nuggets.… They don't know what's important. [Report Form] teaches them how to pick out what's important in the passage."

Ms. Janiak also compared some of the features of the Report Form methodology with the anticipated newest version of the state-wide assessment. Report Form, she stated, teaches students to "number the paragraphs, which is kind of good, because now I see that the [state-wide assessment] is numbering theirs." She further commented:

> So my kids will be able to really match. And [Report Form has them] leaving a blank area, 'cause my kids write on the side, what the supporting detail is and try to identify the key fact or main idea of the paragraph. The new [state-wide assessment] … has that blank area for making notes. So, they're going to be very good at that.

She asserted, "The kids got it, they can do it." She noted further that "a couple of the kids really did pretty well on the last testing situation."

In terms of how she delivers the instruction, Ms. Janiak stated that she uses a "lot of VAKT (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, and Tactile). We use a lot of visual, we use a lot of auditory. I like a lot of hands-on. Feel, tactile." She also has the students use gross motor skills to "write bigger" on "magic slates," which she explained are dry erase boards, and then they move to the fine motor skills. She noted that she uses the dry erase boards when introducing sound-symbol associations so that she can closely monitor students' grasp of the concept as they write down multi-syllabic words syllable by syllable on their slates. When Ms. Janiak observes a student write an incorrect vowel as she circulates up and down the aisles, she can easily take note and tell the student, "Okay, look at that word again. Say the second syllable. What do you think it is?" She related to me, "At the start of the year, I'll have my *Stars of the Alphabet* up," referring to visual materials from Project Read which highlight the important role vowels play in words. "Because," Ms. Janiak added, "a lot of the ESL kids didn't [know the vowel sounds in English]. The sound … / /, the /i/."

Ms. Janiak continued, "I try to reach all of them. 'Cause … Not all kids—I'm not an auditory learner. I can't do anything auditorily. I'm a visual learner and I'm a doer. I'm a kinesthetic." She talked about computer training for teachers taking place on Sánchez campus after school that afternoon, and asserted that "as long as I'm doing it, I can touch it, I can do it, I can create it, then I'll learn a lot better." She concluded, "I try

to make sure [that] at least, within each class, we have something that touch[es] on all of the intelligence bases."

Ms. Janiak also talked about her grouping practices. Though much of her instruction appeared to be done with the whole group of students, she did pair students for some activities. She explained that when her instructional goal is a rich understanding of material, she pairs a weaker reader with one who is able to read and understand the text to enable the pairs to succeed in their task of reading the written materials and identifying the key facts. Ms. Janiak asserted, "I pair the strong [with the weak], I really do." She elaborated, "[If] I want some thought-provoking [discussions], [and] they have to identify the key fact and boil it down into like a word or two, then we need some more of that broad [knowledge]."

Referring to the special education teacher with whom she shared the room, Ms. Janiak noted, "I know that Mr. Paul pairs [students] in equal reading ability." Though different from her own pairing practices, she indicated that Mr. Paul's method is appropriate for particular purposes, as she remarked, "With fluency practice, that is the best way to do that."

Ms. Janiak then added, "And then, sometimes I let them choose [their partner], too. It all depends on how much you want to do." She noted that, though not a pairing activity, a few students work away from the group on the Lexia program during the first few minutes of class. The Lexia program, which targets the speed and accuracy of students' decoding skills, is individualized and responds to each student's input.

Finally, in describing her instruction, Ms. Janiak stated that behavior management is very important, and reported that "in the beginning of the year, everybody's on a behavior management [point sheet]. Till I can see that they're on about 95 percentile." She talked about the benefits of this system, stating, "They know that they have to answer

to [someone], and their parent signs it on Friday." Those students who return a signed check sheet have "points added to their weekly grade." She added, "So, [I'm able to] see who's responsible, and they get extra point[s], [and I see] who's not." As part of her behavior management approach, Ms. Janiak also emphasized the importance of "work[ing] on respect with the class." She noted, "The first month of school is nothing but [working on respect]."

### Assessing Understanding and Progress

I asked Ms. Janiak how she monitored her students' understanding of the lesson. She indicated that she looks for active involvement in classroom activities as affirmation that students understand the lesson. She added, "If they're actively engaged, then they're usually learning." I wondered how she assessed students' growth in reading. Ms. Janiak indicated that she does "a lot of informal reading inventories—the Brigance (Brigance, 1999), and with the Lexia program."

I asked Ms. Janiak what her expectations were for her EL learners with LD, compared to what she expects from her native-English speaking students. She replied, "Probably on a par with the … [other] resource kids.… They make the same gains." She indicated that she is satisfied with what she is seeing in terms of both the rate and amount of progress her EL learners with LD are making in reading.

## Considerations, Modifications, and Accommodations for EL Learners

### *Planning Considerations*

I asked Ms. Janiak what she considers when planning the presentation of a lesson for the EL learners in particular. She asserted, "I look at … what do I want them to get out of it." She continued, "I look at the interest level.… Creating an interest.… I look at … critical thinking." She added, "I get good questions [from the students], like out of

Berenice—[she] loves to participate. Graciela gives me wonderful, thought-provoking [questions].… I do want them to be able to think, and question." She noted later that with the ability to think critically, "[Students] are able to articulate, they're able to go further … in their verbal communications.… The world, rather than just the textbook," a task she accomplishes in part by sharing with students "a lot of pictures … that we pull in from a lot of different sources." Indeed, during a unit on a novel set in Denmark during the German occupation of Europe, I observed Ms. Janiak bring in old photographs of members of her family taken during World War II. She used the pictures of soldiers and tanks to round out and give substance to a discussion about the conditions of daily living in Denmark during the war, which included the omnipresence of the occupying German soldiers, according to the book the students were reading, *Number the Stars*.

Ms. Janiak continued talking about her planning considerations, acknowledging, "But I do want them to be interested.… Sequence, scope, interest level, [and] I want them to be engaged." I asked Ms. Janiak whether she ever had to consider the level of language with her students. She replied, "Well, we try to build on it." She indicated that vocabulary was "one of the lowest [areas] on their [state-wide assessment], in the regular [education] and [special education.]… Vocabulary development. So … it's good to keep introducing new words. Try to parlay it with something that they know." In summary, Ms. Janiak stated that in planning instruction for the EL learners, she considers scope and sequence and her instructional goals for the lesson, and additionally considers factors such as students' interests, student engagement in the lesson, and the development of critical thinking skills. Additionally, she thinks about vocabulary needs, as well, and mentioned developing vocabulary by building on what students already know.

***Modifications and Accommodations***

I asked Ms. Janiak if she ever had to use the students' native language to communicate what she wants, or to ask a bilingual peer to assist. Ms. Janiak responded, "We do it a lot in math.… We have a heavy ESL population in math." Ms. Janiak conveyed that the students she taught in language arts, at least those she taught the year of the study, understood her instruction and did not need to have either materials or spoken instructions translated. She related, "If I have to, I used to have a pictionary. But it seems like my kids this year really have got a good grasp on things." Later she reiterated, "Not in language arts.… I mean, there's really not a whole lot that you can do. But I do [get my point across], they get the point. I've never had any problems with that."

In our conversation about modifications and accommodations, Ms. Janiak asserted, "I use a lot of hands-on [activities]." Ms. Janiak noted employing strategies that make abstract concepts more concrete and visible for her students. She described a lesson she does with students to develop their writing skills. Specifically, the lesson is designed to teach students the function of and different types of adjectives (e.g., *looks/physical*; *behavior/personality*; *number*; *ownership*; and to *set apart*, in accordance with Project Read's written expression manual (Greene & Enfield, 1999), which she called *subject describers*, as laid out in the Project Read curriculum. Ms. Janiak related that she brings in a collection of "all kinds of different cups" that she displays in the front of the room. She explained, "I'll say, 'Okay. Describe this cup.' I had one that was a Ringling Brothers cup. I go, 'Oh, the one with the clown, with the red hair,' or, 'The blue cup that's insulated.' 'Those are *subject describers*.'" She asserted, "I've task-analyzed it, and … with … Tory Greene's [co-author of *Project Read*) ] methodology, it's really become very, very, very simple." She continued, "And this is how we begin.… 'What's special about [the subject]?'… You know, '[What does it] look like?'"

During early activities when students are learning a concept, Ms. Janiak uses simple, straight forward terms. She commented, "I take advantage of real simple terms" in introducing concepts, such as using the phrase subject describers instead of the term adjectives. She elaborated, "We start … real simple.… Like if we're reading something about rose bush fences. 'What is it? It's a rose bush that acts like a fence.'" She added, "So I think I use enough simple terms in the beginning and make it [comprehensible]."

Ms. Janiak continued, "And then, after they know [about] subject describers, [I teach them about using] a key–'Cause I always got a key [makes an unlocking motion with her hands] 'A key is going to do what? It's going to unlock your door. We're unlocking the reading in this paragraph.'" A key fact, synonymous to the more abstract term main idea, *unlocks* (Greene & Enfield, 1999) the most important information about the subject in each paragraph. Unlocking key facts, a basic strategy in the Project Read report form comprehension guide, is one element of an explicit process for approaching expository text.

Ms. Janiak mentioned working with students on another strategy component of the Report Form strand of Project Read. The strategy directs students to collect and code the facts in the factual text and sort the facts into labeled compartments, steps which are elements of the broader comprehension strategy called, "Reading to Prove." She described how she introduces this concept to the students, stating, "'Remember when you were kids—your cubby.'… And I said, 'You put your stuff in your cubby. What belongs in your cubby? Does you coat belong in? No! That belongs in the coat closet.'" Thus, Ms. Janiak explicitly compared the strategy of labeling and compartmentalizing facts to the more familiar activity of sorting and putting away one's belongings in a cubby at school. Ms. Janiak affirmed, "They all know what compartments [are used for]: 'You got to put your cups where?' 'In a special spot.' 'That's right, because they're what?' 'They're

cups.' 'Good.'" Using these more concrete examples, Ms. Janiak teaches students how to think about coding and organizing the facts they are reading in expository text.

In summary, Ms. Janiak identified the employment of hands-on strategies coupled with the use of concrete terms, examples, and activities such as those contained in the Project Read curriculum to teach abstract comprehension concepts and writing skills in her discussion of modifications. The accommodation she specifically mentioned in terms of her EL learners was having a pictionary available in previous years.

### LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

Ms. Janiak appeared satisfied with the instruction and curriculum she employs to teach reading to EL learners with LD, but acknowledged that some teachers at Sánchez Middle School could benefit from further training to increase their knowledge regarding teaching EL learners. Ms. Janiak observed, "I'm satisfied with the programs that *I've* implemented, and that some teachers have implemented. But I do find that some teachers are … still … at a beginning [level] … just about emerging.… So there needs to be more." She added, "This is a new campus.… And it takes a while to establish a real strong staff, a real knowledgeable staff."

I asked whether the ESL teacher at Sánchez had provided staff with any training or an information sheet to facilitate teachers' work with EL learners. Ms. Janiak stated that the administration was trying to start a training program on campus, and the teachers had been given an overview of ESL methods at one of the faculty meetings. Ms. Janiak commented that what teachers like in training is more visits within the classroom, with more hands-on methods, because, she asserted, that is closer to the methods teachers use in teaching the students. Ms. Janiak noted that teaches are more likely to be able to adopt some of the strategies they are learning if training is provided in this manner.

Ms. Janiak did not indicate she had been thinking of making any changes in her curriculum or methods of instruction, and appeared very satisfied with her current program.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

I asked whether Ms. Janiak if there was anything else the school could or should be doing that she believed would help move the EL Learners along in their skills. Ms. Janiak spoke about the workload teachers have and the biweekly professional development that was mandated for teachers on her campus. She reported:

> Sometimes [the training is] not focused into the … specific areas that a teacher needs to address. And I guess, because teachers are overwhelmed with *that*, I've seen less … professional development during the school year in some areas than what I have in the past. So I would continue to encourage teachers to do … professional development programs.

She appeared to attribute the decrease in attendance at professional development opportunities to this, as she added, "Because a lot of the [teachers]… [due to] the substitute problem, [the time and work demands are] overwhelming. So a lot of teachers [are] just are not doing it like they should." She noted, "But now with the new certification process, a lot of the younger teachers are [attending professional development]." As for herself, Ms. Janiak asserted, "I make sure I have at least a minimum [of] 12 hours … every year," and she clarified that this was in addition to the training that she did for the District.

I asked Ms. Janiak, as a teacher of EL learners with LD, to describe her own responsibilities toward the students. She responded, "It's the same responsibilities that I have for every other kid in my classroom.… That I'm going to hold the carrot up high. I am going to want them to work hard for it." She added, "I am very consistent, I am very demanding at times. … And it gets harder as the year goes through. I have high

expectations and I want all the children to work towards that." She continued, "I don't like failuristic-type attitudes, you know, 'I can't do it.' 'Yes, you can. You can do it, and you're being lazy if you don't want to try to get there.'" Additionally, Ms. Janiak appeared to regard good behavior management skills as an important part of her responsibilities as a teacher. She stated, "And then … you'd have to become a real strong behavioral management person, too, in order to try to keep the behaviors down, so that you can focus on the learning and not the behavior." She concluded, "I have high standards for the kids, and I think that's the main thing."

## Ms. Carol Reinhart

As reported in Chapter III, the first interview with Ms. Reinhart did not record correctly. Because mid-spring is a very busy time for department chairs with state-wide accountability testing activities, upon discovering the taping mishap, I asked Ms. Reinhart if she wished to continue participating in the study. I told her I would understand if she preferred to withdraw at this point, since continuing would entail another "initial" interview, and our interviews and observations might run later in the year than anticipated. Ms. Reinhart considered the situation, and after a few moments' hesitation, agreed to continue in the study. We therefore met again for the purpose of establishing Ms. Reinhart's answers to the questions posed in the first interview. Because I was largely familiar with her responses to the questions, I was also at this time able to conduct a more thorough member check of my understanding of her answers to the interview questions (and to pose follow-up questions) than I might have if I had been hearing her answers for the first time.

Thus, to a large extent, this "initial" interview served the purposes of the first two interviews I conducted with the other participants. However, with the school year

wrapping up and time constraints due to Ms. Reinhart's numerous end-of-year activities as a teacher and as the department chair, we were not able to meet for a final face-to-face interview. We discussed and agreed on a written alternative to the final member-checking interview. I subsequently provided Ms. Reinhart with a packet that presented each interview question I had asked, followed by one or more brief, rich quotations from her answer, which were followed by my understanding of her position in a summary format. If I had a follow-up question, this was presented underneath the summary. Beneath this text related to the question, I invited Ms. Reinhart to share comments and/or clarifications she might wish to make related to that question and summary, leaving plenty of blank space for her to jot down her response. Ms. Reinhart subsequently answered the additional questions I had posed, but did not record any further comments or make any changes to my summaries. She made the packet available for me to pick up by an agreed-upon date, and in this way, Ms. Reinhart completed participation in the study. As a result, the extent of the information available to create the portrait of Ms. Reinhart was not as great as that for the other teachers.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PRIOR TEACHING EXPERIENCES

As presented in Chapter III, in addition to her teaching duties, Ms. Reinhart served as chair of the special education department at Sánchez Middle School. The year of the study was the second year she had taught reading to students with LD; she was also an inclusion teacher in science.

Ms. Reinhart described how she had taught reading before the school adopted the Corrective Reading program. She acknowledged, "We used a lot of pulling from here and there." She continued, "We also did some of the *Project Read* material.… *That* [program] focuses a little bit more [on] the writing, the reading, and everything.… It didn't go just back straight to decoding. But we pulled a lot of that material." Seeking clarification

about her previous instruction, I asked, "So, there wasn't … an intact curriculum?" Ms. Reinhart smiled and said quietly, "No." She related, "We used the goals and objectives [in students' Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs)] …. That's a lot of what we do, is go back into their folders and look at their goals and objectives."

Ms. Reinhart described the difficulty she experienced in maintaining a supply of engaging materials with which to teach reading to her students with LD, and she spoke about her efforts to locate materials that would both capture the attention of her students that were also within their ability to read. She related, "[I would] just try to find, I would always try to find stories … the high interest, low reading [grade level] materials … that I thought would interest that particular group of kids, which is *difficult* to find." She added the following comment:

> You realize how low they *are* –how low you have to take the materials, sometimes And it's *real* difficult to find this type of … just stories or articles, chapter books … [at] 1st and 2nd [reading grade level], that *they* can pick up and independently read. There's not a lot out there, right now.

Ms. Reinhart is one of several teachers implementing the Corrective Reading program at Sánchez to teach reading to her students with learning disabilities. In order to teach the CR program, Ms. Reinhart reported, "We went ahead and tested all of the 6th grade students that were not TAAS passers.… They took a … grade level indicator for reading, which was vocabulary, and then just word usage, and they also … took a fluency test." She continued, "And with this information then we redid all of the schedules and we put them into groups." Ms. Reinhart commented about the additional benefits that ability grouping can provide, as reflected in the following statement:

> And I think that has also helped for this group, just because I think they were able to feel safe, that nobody was going to make fun of them, and that they were kind of *all* unsure of the vowels, or all unsure of— you know, they had the same concerns. And I think they felt safe enough that at this point to want to start reading.

Acknowledging the differing opinions on ability grouping, Ms. Reinhart added, "And I know that's not what a lot of … researcher practices say. But in this particular situation, I think, and maybe for this program and for this age level, that it … definitely worked."

When we first spoke about her instruction, Ms. Reinhart had indicated that she had been a little bit resistant to the program's approach because she felt it took away some of her creativity. However, she said, she wanted the students to learn to read, and she had felt it was time to "try something different." She reported that she began to "buy into" the program when she saw "how [the students] responded to the program."

Referring to significant differences between the CR program and practices associated with the Principles of Learning that Greenriver had adopted and directed teachers to incorporate into their teaching (in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning), Ms. Reinhart commented, "[CR is] a very different approach. And actually, it's not what [the District] recommends, you know, it's not your accountable talk, and it's not your criteria charts, and work on the wall." She continued, "But … I also realize that the kids hadn't been successful, doing it this way.… And so, I guess I was willing to give it a try, to say, you know, we need to do something else." She added, "The teachers that I have talked to … the people that have participated in this particular grant, they have all found the same thing."

## TEACHING READING AT SÁNCHEZ MIDDLE SCHOOL

### The Classroom Context

Ms. Reinhart shares the large rectangular classroom with Ms. Albertson, another language arts teacher at Sánchez. Immediately to the right of the door as one enters is Ms. Reinhart's teacher's desk, parallel to and just in front of the wall that forms the front of

the room. A chalkboard occupies most of the front wall. A few feet in front of the chalkboard, placed at the beginning of the rows of student desks, is a table that contains work materials. A podium is next to the table. Ms. Albertson's desk is in the far corner diagonally opposite the door, near the row of windows along that wall. The students' desks, all facing the front, are in rows that fill the central area of the room.

**The Classroom Community**

I observed a 6th grade reading class. There are nine students present; five are Latino/a, two are African American, and two are white. Though Ms. Reinhart gave permission slips to most of the Latinos/as, only one of the EL learners, Fabio, returned a permission slip, and therefore I had access only to his educational folder. Fabio began school in a bilingual program, and had first qualified for special education services towards the end of 2nd grade as a student with Other Health Impairment (OHI) and Orthopedic Impairment (OI), when he had been diagnosed with a serious illness. Fabio received homebound services, until, following a December meeting of the ARD committee in grade 3, he enrolled for the spring semester in an elementary school that was different than the one he had attended in his earlier schooling.

During this year of transition from homebound services to school re-entry, the folder information suggests that Fabio began transitioning from bilingual to English instruction. The teacher who worked with Fabio on his schoolwork in the homebound program reported that he appeared to function better in English. The records for the 4th grade clearly indicate instruction was in English. In the spring of his 5th grade, Fabio was tested for a learning disability, and he was subsequently found to qualify for special education services as a student with LD.

Fabio's IEP indicated that he was to be tested in reading on the State Developed Alternative Assessment at the 1st grade level in the spring of 2002. His goals in language

arts were to increase word recognition to improve reading to the 1st grade level, to read short vowel sound words at the 2nd grade level, and to improve written expression skills (i.e., write a brief paragraph containing an introduction and at least 5 sentences demonstrating correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling conventions) to the 2nd grade level. Fabio also had goals in math, and, apparently in reference to his medical condition, a goal to work on physical strengthening exercises.

**Teacher's Perceptions of Students' Language**

I asked Ms. Reinhart to describe the conversational skills of her EL learners with LD. She responded, "I think in some respects … it depends what the topic of conversation is." She elaborated,

> If it's a general conversation that peers usually have, yes, they probably have [the conversational skills]. But if they're talking … where [the native-English speaking students are] using some of the slang from the English language, I think that [the EL Learners] may not fully understand the slang meaning, to interpret what is actually being said.

She reiterated, "But … I think they are able to have general conversations with [the native English-speaking students].

In terms of the ability of her EL learners with LD to work with academic materials in English, Ms. Reinhart suggested that the reading of science and social studies texts, rich with content-specific vocabularies and unfamiliar concepts, posed a greater challenge for the EL learners. Ms. Reinhart stated, "I think they probably have a little bit more of a difficult time, especially in the science and social studies." She posited that these subjects were more challenging for EL learners "because the vocabulary is more difficult, the reading is more difficult, and they may not have the field of knowledge or the background to understand what is being said." Ms. Reinhart indicated that the pictures and other visual displays in social studies and science textbooks are sometimes

effective supports for EL learners. She added, "Or with the hands-on, like a science experiment.… I think that helps them." Ms. Reinhart concluded, "But I think just a lecture, or maybe reading out of the book … [the EL learners] may have a little bit of a [hard time making] sense."

I asked Ms. Reinhart how long she thinks students need to acquire the academic English that the students encounter in their textbook reading. She answered, "I think they probably will [need], I would say 3 to 4 years." She continued, "But I think if they have a learning disability, where they're slower in acquiring the language skills and the vocabulary … they may be behind maybe all of their … school career, depending on, I think, the complexity of the subject." Ms. Reinhart explained, "Each year the … subject area gets more difficult, where they will … maybe have to really struggle at it."

Ms. Reinhart suggested that parental support for what is taught in school may make the schooling experience easier for students, as she stated, "I think, also … if [the students] could get some help at home, or tutoring, it may be easier for them." Conversely, if support for school learning is lacking at home and students come to perceive their schooling as having little value beyond the classroom, Ms. Reinhart posited that students will not be "able to apply [what they've been taught] later on.… They may struggle with this."

### TEACHER'S KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT "GOOD" READING INSTRUCTION

Ms. Reinhart described good reading instruction specifically in terms of the program she was using the year the study took place, as she responded to my query regarding good reading instruction for EL learners with LD by stating, "I guess at the present time I'm real pleased with the progress the kids are making … with this Corrective Reading Program." Ms. Reinhart went on to identify skills addressed in the program such as decoding, including the practice of breaking down words into smaller

parts to facilitate decoding; fluency; comprehension; and sight word instruction. She added that vocabulary is another element that is taught, and stated that she skims through the lessons before she teaches them with an eye toward identifying vocabulary terms with which the students may not be familiar. Ms. Reinhart indicated that the approach the CR program utilizes of taking students "back to the beginning" with basic phonics has helped "find [students'] weaknesses and to reinforce those areas."

## CONTENT AND METHODS OF MS. REINHART'S READING INSTRUCTION

### Snapshot of Instruction in the Reading Class

I observed Ms. Reinhart's instruction in a 6th grade resource reading class. The following description of classroom instruction includes events that occurred on two different days. Ms. Reinhart begins the CR lesson by writing several columns of letters and letter combinations such as *v*, *x, er*, *wh*, and *ing*, on the board as well as two columns of words, for example, *of*, *horn*, *grims*, and *sending*. She points to the first letter and asks, "What sound?" The students produce the sound represented by the letter *v*. "What letter?" asks Ms. Reinhart. The students respond. "What letter?" she asks again. She follows this procedure for each letter on the board. When they reach the columns of words, Ms. Reinhart reads a word, then asks, "What word?" She pauses at the word *grims* and asks, "What's this?" The students attempt to read the word.

Ms. Reinhart writes three words on the board: *sleep*, *sleet*, and *sleek*. She pronounces each word, and asks students to repeat them. The students stumble in reading the three words. Ms. Reinhart tries this activity twice, then tells the students, "They all have the / / sound." She turns to the next part of the lesson and tells students, "Listen: *tell*, *teal*, *told*. Which has the middle sound / /?" She thanks Fabio for responding. The next activity involves dictation. Ms. Reinhart directs students to write down "one letter

that says, /w/." Then, "Write two letters that go together to say /w/. Next sound: /ch/. What sound? /ch/. Write it!" Ms. Reinhart circulates as she dictates sounds and words. "What sound? /ing/. What word? *slipping*." She has the students start this section over because not everyone is responding.

The next exercise requires students to read brief sentences. Each student's name is on a tongue depressor, and Ms. Reinhart allows a student to pull the sticks from a can one at a time to determine who will read next. Examples of the sentences in the exercise are, "He told me, 'Do not go to class,'" "How steep was that hill?" and "How fast can she cut the grass?" Fabio comments about the meaning of a sentence the students were reading, remarking, "That doesn't make sense." Ms. Reinhart responds, "Guys, we can't change the words or the program." She adds, "You're progressing to the point where some of them won't make sense—[they're] expanding your vocabulary." (Ms. Reinhart explained to me later that the students associated the word "batter" with baseball, and so did not understand it in a sentence where it was associated with bread making.)

Ms. Reinhart directs students to finish their workbook, and then practice the story (a brief paragraph about cold cut sandwiches), which will be a timed reading activity. While Ms. Reinhart answers a phone call, one student practices reading the paragraph aloud as another student times her with the stopwatch. Ms. Reinhart then times each student in turn as they read the brief paragraph aloud. She tells them their time when they finish, and praises each student for his or her reading. Ms. Reinhart checks their workbooks as she listens to them read. After everyone had read, one student, a boy who appears to be of European American ethnicity, asks, "What are *cold cuts*?" Fabio follows this question with one of his own, as he asks, "What are *drips*?," referring to a term in the paragraph. Ms. Reinhart briefly explained the terms.

**Teacher's Description of Instruction in the Reading Class**

I asked Ms. Reinhart to talk about what she teaches to students in her resource reading classes and to describe how she taught reading that year. She talked about specific skills she and the students are working on, including decoding, reading fluency, vocabulary, spelling, and, she noted, "We're starting … some comprehension questions." She observed that the program is "also working in a few of the irregular spelled works—you know, those would be basically their sight words." The students are learning about digraphs and "the ending sounds, like the /ing/, and the /er/'s."

She related that the students have begun to look at the beginnings and endings of words and to learn how they are spelled. She stated:.

> So, they're starting prefixes and suffixes. … They have a difficult time with the … *e-d* ending. They always want to make it *walked-ed*, instead of *walked*. So then we have a conversation, well, if that's the way you were talking, would you say, "I walked-ed to school this morning?" … So, then they realize.

In terms of strategies or methods that Ms. Reinhart uses to teach the CR program, she remarked, "Most of it is [whole group]… We work together as a group, because it is the direct instruction with the choral responses." Ms. Reinhart related, however, that many of the students have also taken to turning to each other to rehearse reading in order to improve their performance before each one is called on to read a timed passage. She reported that her students enjoy practicing reading the paragraph with a classmate before it is their turn to be timed. She elaborated as follows:

> What we're doing now that we've gotten to these paragraphs…. They like practicing with each other before they're actually timed. And they will … just kind of gravitate toward one another and they will read the … paragraph to the other person before it's actually their turn. *They* want to practice it. And … even if they don't read the whole paragraph, they'll go through and they'll look for maybe a word or two that they aren't sure of [and read that section aloud].

She noted, “What’s funny is they want to … improve their score, especially if they’re the first one to read. That person always gets the second chance because they had to go first.”

**Assessing Understanding and Progress**

I wondered how Ms. Reinhart judged whether the EL learners had understood a lesson. Ms. Reinhart talked about the paragraphs that students were reading. She stated, “Right now … it’s just a like a 55-word paragraph. So, after the students read it together, I will read it, like two sentences at a time, and ask comprehension questions about it.” She explained later that the oral comprehension questions required students to be able to listen to and read the passage. She then related, “What’s cute [was] … this morning … they were reading something, and one of them said, ‘Miss Reinhart, this sentence just doesn’t make sense.’” She added, “So I think they’re even starting to analyze the sentences now. And so we read it again, and it *was* a confusing sentence.” She added, “And I think [the publishers] do it because they’re trying to put the [sounds], make it simple enough with the sounds … to reinforce … the words and sounds that they’ve been taught.” She concluded, “And so sometimes … it sounds a little awkward, or it sounds a little funny.”

In light of her satisfaction with the CR program, I wondered how Ms. Reinhart assessed her students’ growth in reading. Ms. Reinhart talked about evidence that the students’ reading is improving in everyday interactions. She recounted, “This was just a while ago. … We’re having a breakfast for them Tuesday morning, so I handed [out] the … invitations, and one of the kids picked it up, he goes, ‘Miss, look!’ and he read it to me.” Thus, the students are able to read text that was previously beyond their abilities.

Ms. Reinhart talked about assessment measures that were done before the CR program began and again just recently in order to document the change in scores. “We’ve done the grade level indicator before and after. They’ve taken the Brigance before and

after, and I want to give them a Brigance again next week." She noted that the CR program has periodic testing scheduled to document progress. She explained, "After lesson, I think 20, 45, and 65, they take a–not an end of the unit, but they take a test over that information. And so far, they've all been able to pass … those unit tests." Ms. Reinhart added, "And then just the fluency [measures], the timing that we do.… We do that daily. And so, they're able to see their own … growth." She then stated that she and the students have established other ways to take note of progress, commenting, "And we've also just made a point to count words … in what they're reading.… We've gone back just to show how the difficulty and the amount that they're reading has increased."

We had spoken in our earlier interview about the progress in reading she has observed in her EL learners compared to that of the native-English speaking students, and I asked Ms. Reinhart whether she was satisfied with the growth and rate of progress she was seeing in her EL learners. She replied, "I think they have made more of a growth [than the native-English speakers]. I really do. Ramón … [and] little Rogelio, I mean, he has really become very fluent.… They have just really picked up on this." She noted that the EL learners might be making greater gains than the native-English speakers due to "the desire to be successful." She continued, "To me … it's just finding what their strengths and weaknesses were, or gaps in what they already know." Ms. Reinhart mused, "And it filled in something … or maybe it just clicked, I don't know. They're doing well." She concluded, "I guess at the present time I'm real pleased with the progress the kids are making … with this Corrective Reading Program.… I have seen a lot of gains in the Spanish-speaking kids."

Ms. Reinhart then speculated on the basis of the gains she observed, stating, "[It's] because [the CR program] has taken them back to the beginning. We are working on decoding, we're working on the basic phonics. And I think maybe some of them were

a little unsure of these, and … we're working on just how you put these sounds together to make the words, and I think this approach has helped a lot of them just pick up the gaps. To find their weaknesses and to pi[ck up], you know, to reinforce those areas.… I've seen a lot of success in [them]." Thus, Ms. Reinhart appeared very satisfied with the effectiveness of the CR program with her EL learners.

## Considerations, Modifications, and Accommodations for EL learners

### *Planning Considerations*

I asked Ms. Reinhart what kinds of things she considers when planning the presentation of a lesson for the EL learners in her classroom. She replied, "Well … this is … just a very direct teach program. I mean, it's so scripted … all of the materials are provided for us in the program." Thus, Ms. Reinhart appeared to suggest that the CR program, with its accompanying student books, workbooks, and teacher's manual that contained teaching scripts, coupled with nature of the direct instruction approach of the program, obviated the need to plan lessons.

### *Modifications and accommodations*

Ms. Reinhart did not identify any modifications or accommodations she might make for EL learners. She commented, however, that she does attempt to preview the day's lesson before she teaches. She stated, "So what I really, I try to do is … before the lesson, is just look through any of the words that … they may have a difficult [time with], maybe with the vocabulary." When the students appear confused or unsure about the meaning of a word, Ms. Reinhart explains the term.

## LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

Ms. Reinhart indicated that for her particular situation, for her "case," she was satisfied with the programs her school had in place to address the needs of EL learners

with LD in reading, though she noted that the previous year there had been a group of Spanish-speaking students in science who may have benefited from the support a bilingual teacher could have provided. She reported, "I know that there were some concerns that maybe they ought to have more of a[n] inclusion with some of the kids." She said, "I think this was something last year, because there was a little group of kids, [the thinking was] if they go into like a science class, maybe if they had a bilingual teacher in there, that could do some interpreting, that this may be beneficial." Ms. Reinhart remarked, "I don't know how many faculty … or staff members are bilingual. And I don't know how carefully the planning is when they schedule these students to make sure that they have a bilingual teacher."

In looking ahead to the coming year, Sánchez Middle School plans to unroll their Corrective Reading program right from the first days of school. Teachers had already done assessments with students and taken steps to ensure that the following year students would be placed into classes based on reading levels from the start, thereby yielding the relatively homogeneous grouping the Corrective Reading program incorporates. Ms. Reinhart noted, "And I think this'd be a lot easier, 'cause they won't have to redo schedules, and they will start it at the beginning of the year. Rather than … having to throw them into it, in December." In this way, the CR program can begin right away.

Ms. Reinhart indicated she and other teachers have been discussing ways to bring in the families to a greater degree next year than what occurred the year of the study. Parents will be brought on board right from the start of the year. Ms. Reinhart stated,

> [We'll] make sure … if [parents] understand the program … and if they have an opportunity [to look at the program]. We were even talking about, like, when we have orientation, or back to school night, to make sure that the material is available for the parents to look at. And make sure the first week of school, a letter goes home.

Ms. Reinhart remarked, "This year a letter went home, but, I'm not sure how many of them got the information. So we want to put it in the envelope the first week of school when everything else goes home." She explained that the letter that goes home "describes the program. Then there is another, second letter that goes [home] if they're like in the A Group, and it talks a little bit about skills that they'll be working on."

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ms. Reinhart appeared to be satisfied with the school's efforts and programs to teach reading to EL learners, with the caveat that there be someone who can interpret or translate for a student who does not understand. I wondered whether Ms. Reinhart felt there was anything else the school could or should be doing to move the EL learners with LD forward. "No," she responded, and added, "As long as [the students] get the necessary support.… As long [as] they have somebody that is able to interpret if they don't understand.… I think those are the major … concerns." Ms. Reinhart indicated she believed the school had the responsibility of helping a student "be a well-rounded person." In terms of her own responsibility toward the EL learners with LD, she stated, "[My responsibility is] to help them become the best readers they can.… And understand what they're reading."

## Mr. Robert LeBlanc

### EXPERIENCES AS A BEGINNING TEACHER AND IN PRIOR TEACHING

At the time of the study, Mr. LeBlanc was in his second year of teaching. In his earlier experiences as a teacher aide and substitute teacher, Mr. LeBlanc stated that he had not had the responsibility of planning lessons and all of the curricular and instructional decisions that this implies. The year before the study was the first year in which Mr. LeBlanc had carried full responsibility for the plethora of tasks incumbent

upon a full-time special education teacher, which, in addition to duties related to teaching reading and language arts to students with special needs, also entailed planning for and carrying out a variety of tasks required to manage the educational program of a set of students with special needs for whom he was the assigned *folder teacher*, or case manager. Mr. LeBlanc was the only participant with fewer than 10 years of teaching experience, and who had obtained an alternative certification in special education. In the 2001-2002 school year, Mr. LeBlanc taught language arts and, for the first time, reading.

Mr. LeBlanc described how he had taught his language arts classes his first year of teaching, the year just prior to the study, which was before the school had adopted Corrective Reading. He commented that at the beginning of the year, he had been thrilled that there wasn't a certain book he had to work out of or a set curriculum he was required to follow. The absence of an in-place curriculum had excited his imagination, and he had felt that this gave him the freedom to be more creative in how he taught language arts.

Mr. LeBlanc had put together an assortment of creative projects for students to work on that differed in the amount of work required to carry out the project and in the nature of the end product to be turned in for grades. Each project was assigned a different point value; assignments requiring more work or judged to be more difficult to execute were worth more points than easier, less complex assignments. Students were free to select the projects they were interested in, with the caveat that the projects they chose must add up to 100 points. This allowed for a great deal of student choice and variability. For example, a student might choose to complete only 5 of the more challenging projects, or could choose to do more of the simpler assignments. Students selected a project from the menu, and got together in small groups of about 4 students to work on their chosen assignment. Once a project was completed, students again selected an assignment from

the menu, and then were free to join a different group of students to work with. Mr. LeBlanc related that he had done "almost every lesson as part of a project."

Mr. LeBlanc elaborated a bit further on the nature of the assignments, and then shared how the students had responded to his curriculum. An example of one assignment, he said, was to write a research paper on an animal, including information such as what the animal looks like, what it eats, what its lifestyle is like, the habitat it lives in, etc. Another assignment required students to design their own game, another included working with maps, one involved sports, and, he stated, the projects included "all different kinds of things." He related:

> And I had a lot of great ideas, but … [the students] just didn't have the skills to accomplish it the way I thought.… I guess I went in to [it] thinking that, if it was more interesting and more fun than regular class, then they'll be sure to do it. But they couldn't. They would have liked to have done it, most of them.

When I asked Mr. LeBlanc what he thought some of the factors might have been in the students' being unable to successfully complete the projects, he explained as follows:

> I assumed far too much. I looked back over my projects last year, at the end of the year, and realized that, they don't have some of the basic skills that they need to do this stuff. Like researching.… They couldn't do that on the computer, or they could copy stuff about [an animal], but they wouldn't know what they were saying.

I wondered if the problems the students had experienced in gleaning information from the internet websites were due more to weak decoding skills or to lack of comprehension. "Less problems with decoding than … understanding what they were reading," Mr. LeBlanc clarified. He elaborated on this as follows:

> When you go to particular web sites—even kids' web sites—probably 95% of the time, it's written in language too difficult for LD kids to understand, or ESL kids to understand. So, it's extremely difficult finding things at their level … at their interest level, too.

Students not only experienced difficulties in understanding what they read about their chosen topic, Mr. LeBlanc stated, but they also were unable to communicate in a report what they had learned. He indicated that his decision to focus on writing skills in language arts was driven by his realization last year that his students lacked the writing skills required to produce simple reports. He explained, "They didn't have the writing skills to pull off what I was expecting of them. Which is why this year I taught writing."

Unable to present their findings effectively in writing, students were no better able to convey what they had learned in an oral presentation to their peers. Mr. LeBlanc observed:

> At the end of each [project] they had to present their whole project in front of the class. And even if [the presentations] were done, the presentations were, shall we say, below par. And so this year … one of my goals was actually to get them to stand up in front of class more often.

He shared an additional realization he had made in his reflections at the end of the previous school year. He commented:

> I guess it doesn't really fall under reading, but … it turns out that it was just too [overwhelming].… When you give them that much work, at once, they think of it [as a big block of work].… It's all a big package, instead of that they can break it down. And it's kind of daunting.

At the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year, before the school adopted and began implementing the Corrective Reading program in early October, Mr. LeBlanc had had his language arts class listen to *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1987) on tape. He again described his instruction and the students' response, as follows:

> We did a book all together in the beginning of the year. It was *The Hobbit*, which is a high-level book, but we did it on tape, and I asked questions all throughout, and … I … pre-wrote out the notes for them to put the answers to. And we did tests, or quizzes, exactly on those notes. And it didn't work. It didn't work at all.

Mr. LeBlanc commented, "I figured that, if you say the words for them, and they're paying attention, and I give them all the notes, and they're finding them as they go, that

they'd understand. But, it didn't work." I asked if the students were following along in a book as they listened to the story on tape. He clarified as follows:

> They weren't reading at the same time. They were just listening. And, the reason I did the *not* reading is because it's at such a high level and they were going to … see some words that they weren't going to be able to read… So. I just had them listen, and … anyway, all that didn't work.

I asked him if he had thought about what some of the barriers might have been to his students being more successful with *The Hobbit* book-on-tape unit. Mr. LeBlanc replied:

> One of the barriers … was that the story was at too high a level for the kids. … Some of the concepts were just a little bit too high. … It used vocabulary that they didn't understand, and, also … the dialect was in English accents and a lot of times they probably missed some of it.… Also, maybe, there was so much that happened, it was such an action-packed book, that they would forget all of the things that had happened.

In summary, Mr. LeBlanc identified the level and complexity of the storyline, the variety and breadth of the vocabulary, the dialect of the language employed and the accent of the voice actors as elements that may have made it difficult for his students to follow the tale of *The Hobbit* and thereby contributed to students' subsequent lack of success on quizzes and tests.

### TEACHING READING AT MCKINNEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

After his experiences last year with project-based instruction and the book-on-tape unit at the start of the year of the study, Mr. LeBlanc remarked that he now appreciates having a book to teach his reading curriculum. As he acknowledged in an informal chat after an observation, at least it is something to refer to when his instruction isn't working. Thus, though at the start of the previous year—his first year of teaching—Mr. LeBlanc had embraced the freedom to create his own curriculum, one year later he appeared to have developed an appreciation for structured, textbook-based instruction.

In regard to reading instruction for English-language learners at McKinney Middle School, Mr. LeBlanc talked about his understanding of how the EL learners had been assessed as part of the school's efforts to place them in the correct program (i.e., ESL or the general education/special education all-English program) for their reading instruction. He described the testing that had taken place as follows:

> We've tested them all. And I think they've both tested them in … Spanish and in reading ability, so they're tested both ways.… Miss Jackson … sat in the library and tested one after another kid for like 4 days. In Spanish and English to just see what their levels were.

He added,

> And I don't know if that correlates with what we're doing at all—if we even found out the results. But, at least they have been tested.… I think the placement from those testings was whether or not they should be in [Ms. Jackson's] [ESL] class.

Thus, Mr. Leblanc was aware that the bilingual students had been tested by the ESL teacher in both Spanish and English, which he appeared to recognize as important, although he did not seem sure if the information obtained through testing had been considered in the school's planning for and implementation of the Corrective Reading Program.

**The Classroom Context**

Mr. LeBlanc's room is a relatively large rectangle. As one enters, student chairs and desks are positioned in rows in the center of the room, all facing the front wall to the left that holds a large chalkboard and bulletin boards. Along the wall immediately to the right as one enters are bookshelves and a small chalkboard, and, in the corner where this near wall meets the long back wall, a small sofa is positioned. Small, opaque windows are visible in the upper portion of the back wall and far wall. More bookshelves line the back wall to the right. On top of several of these shelves against the back wall are glass reptile tanks, which house a variety of snakes. The far side of the room has stacks of

magazines and other papers and materials on top of spare chairs. Mr. LeBlanc's teacher's desk is behind and next to some of these stacks. More snakes are in tanks in this area of the room. There are five Latino boys, four Latino girls, and one African American boy seated at the desks.

**The Classroom Community**

Of the nine Latino students in the reading class, Mr. LeBlanc has given several he believes to be native-Spanish speakers a permission slip to participate in the study. Three have subsequently returned permission slips giving me access to their educational folders; the data for two of the three were subsequently dropped because, though Mr. LeBlanc had identified these students as English language learners, the folders revealed that they were considered by the District to be non-LEP as of approximately three to four years prior to the study. However, Mr. LeBlanc was not mistaken in his belief that Spanish was the native language of these two students: one student's folder indicated that as recently as the year of the study, Spanish was the preferred language of the home, while the folder of the other student indicated that he and his family moved between the United States and Mexico at times, and that he had spent part of the 1999-2000 school year in Mexico. These two students' reading levels were recorded as mid-second to mid-third grade level.

The 6th-grade student whose folder data revealed that he had been in a bilingual special education program until early spring of his 5th grade, and therefore whose data were included with the other student participants, was a latecomer to McKinney Middle School. As a 6th-grader, he had transitioned from elementary school to the middle school in early March of the year of the study. This student's very recent IEP, created at an Admission, Review, and Dismissal meeting shortly before his transition to middle school, established language arts goals "to increase reading to the first grade level," as well as to

"increase written expression skills to the first grade level." This student may have been placed in Mr. LeBlanc's B1 Corrective Reading class, targeting students with skills ranging from second to third grade level, due to the lack of space in the lower level class spoken of by Ms. Bautista. In terms of the state-wide assessment to be administered in mid-April, this student was to be tested with the State Developed Alternative Assessment at the 1st grade level.

**Teacher's Perceptions of Students' Language**

I asked Mr. LeBlanc to talk about his impression of his EL learners' conversational skills in English. "I think it depends on each student," he stated. He continued as follows:

> I don't really have one answer. I guess I would say, for the most part, they're not as comfortable speaking in English.… Obviously, [the level is] a little bit less than English speakers, but … I wouldn't say, conversationally, they're that far behind English speakers … I think any student at this age in general is not going to carry on a good conversation with you.

When the nature of the task turned from chatting with peers or the teacher to handling academic materials, however, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that he needed to simplify vocabulary and rephrase his directions. He related, "I find myself often giving them information in several different ways, instead of just saying it once. For some students I might have to use easier words or different words."

In discussing students' reading difficulties, Mr. LeBlanc talked about students' differing abilities, as he remarked, "Some of them can read very well in Spanish. But not in English. So, it's just a matter of learning the words." He noted, however, "Some of them can't … tell me what two letters make a sound." He noted, "Basically, I teach to, I guess, middle to upper level of my classes. So, hopefully it'll pull the other ones up." He

added, “I just don’t know any other way to do it. I don’t want to teach to the lowest because then all the upper kids will just fail, ‘cause they’re bored.”

I asked Mr. LeBlanc in a follow-up question why he believed that some of the EL learners with LD can read very well in Spanish. He indicated that more than one student in his language arts classes has asked to do their reading in Spanish language books. He elaborated as follows:

> I have … a student … [who is] a very, very low level learner, and in almost every situation, he doesn’t understand what I want. He can’t do the work because he can’t read it. He’s got several different disabilities combined. And yet he asked to read a book in Spanish from the library, and says that he can do better that way. So I allow that. And that’s what I’m basing it on. Several kids I’ve allowed [to] read it in Spanish, even though I can’t tell if they know it or not.

Thus, it appeared that, not wanting the language of the text to impede a student’s working on his or her reading assignment, Mr. LeBlanc allowed bilingual students to read in Spanish. He acknowledged, however, that he is not able to judge whether these students understand what they read, as he is with students reading in English-language books which he can read and then ask comprehension questions.

Seeking to learn more about Mr. LeBlanc’s understanding of the possible implications suggested by a student who can read significantly better in his native language than English, I asked him whether this difference in reading ability in the two languages might have educational ramifications. In apparent recognition that a discrepancy in the reading levels of an EL learner in the native language and in English can provide important information about the student, Mr. LeBlanc replied, “It tells me that they probably aren’t as low as we think they are. It also tells me that English is a much harder language to learn than the language of Spanish, [in] which all the letters always make the same sounds.”

## TEACHER'S KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT "GOOD" READING INSTRUCTION

In response to my question about his knowledge of teaching reading to EL learners, Mr. LeBlanc stated, "I'm sure I had at least one class period on it, but … I can't recall." I asked him in a follow-up question if he felt he had learned anything through his experience of having EL learners in his reading and language arts classes over the previous two years. He responded, "I probably have, although … I don't know if I can put it into words." I asked Mr. LeBlanc to share how he would advise a teacher who, new to the district, came to him for suggestions on how he would handle a roster with several EL learners in the class. Mr. LeBlanc replied as follows:

> I approach them, even though … they might be on a higher level, I approach them as if they were LD kids on a lower level, and I'll explain that. Let's say I have a kid who speaks English and he's reading on a 3rd grade level. And I have a kid who's *learning* to speak English and reading on a 5th grade level—obviously higher. I'll still teach them the same way because what I want them to do … I may not necessarily convey it clearly enough. So I want the … message that I send to be simple enough for them to understand. And … in that respect … it seems that they're about on the same learning level to me.

Thus, Mr. LeBlanc perceived the lower-skilled native-English speaker with LD and the higher-skilled EL learner with LD to be on about the same learning level because the EL learner may not be able to understand the teacher's instructions. Mr. LeBlanc summarized, "And I guess that's what I've learned.… That if English isn't your primary language, it knocks you down a few levels in simple comprehension of what's expected of you."

Mr. LeBlanc indicated that good reading instruction for EL learners with LD is basically the same as that for native English speakers with LD, as reflected in his statement, "I think [good reading instruction is] the same as for normal kids." Mr. LeBlanc suggested that the EL Learners do benefit from more consistent structure, and he noted they need to hear lots of rich language that is at a level that they can understand,

"mostly just inundation with the … words. The more they get, the better they understand." I later asked Mr. LeBlanc to talk more about what he meant by "inundation with the words." He explained, "I think they probably need to see the words and hear the words as much as they possibly can." In checking my interpretation, I asked if he meant providing rich language. "Right. And, especially the language that's at their level in English. For instance, I use more basic language skills when speaking with my students purposely, than I would use, say, speaking with you right now."

## CONTENT AND METHODS OF READING INSTRUCTION

I observed a mixed-grade resource reading class and a 6th-grade resource language arts class. Composite descriptions of instruction in each setting follow.

### Snapshot of Instruction in the Reading Class

Mr. LeBlanc has written four words on the front chalkboard: rail, main, sail, and bait. He pronounces each word, then draws out the meaning of each word from the students. Four new words are written next to the original set: *real*, *mean*, *seal*, and *beat*. Mr. LeBlanc tells the students, "When there are two vowels together, the first one says its name." He has students repeat some of these words: *real, main, sail, beat*.

The students open their CR books, and the teacher asks approximately five students in turn to read the first line of a group of words that provide practice in the vowel combinations they are learning. Then, after reminding the next student to pronounce the *s* at the end of a word, he directs that student to pick someone to read. Mr. LeBlanc then asked for volunteers to read both lines of words. Each time a volunteer read both lines without errors, Mr. LeBlanc gave the student a piece of candy. The teacher asks a quiet boy to read two sections of words, telling him he'll get a lollipop if he can.

Hearing this, many other students call out, “I’ll do it!” Mr. LeBlanc ignores them, instead reminding the student, “Don’t forget, a lot of times you leave the final *s* off.”

The next exercise entails comparing sets of homonyms: *maid, made; sail, sale*, etc. Mr. LeBlanc reminds the class, “They sound exactly alike, but mean very different things.” Following this activity, students read lines of words. He challenges the students, saying, “I better read the next line—You’ll never get it!” One boy answers the challenge, calling out the first word in the line. “Fantastic!” says Mr. LeBlanc. Other students read. One of the words is *I’ll*. Mr. LeBlanc gives a mini-lesson on the contraction, drawing from the students which two words are combined to create *I’ll*. After students have read the lines through once, he has them repeat the section, reading two lines at a turn. Again, he directs a student he called on to “pick a student who looks like he doesn’t want to do it!” Mr. LeBlanc gives another mini-lesson, this time on the difference between *sense* and *cents*. He then .asked the class, “If an *e* is at the end of a word, do you ever say it?” “No!” many students call out. He confirmed the students’ responses. The students then read the next section in the book.

**Teacher’s Description of Instruction in the Reading Class**

I asked Mr. LeBlanc to talk about his reading instruction for EL learners with LD. Mr. LeBlanc noted that students had been grouped by reading levels in order to implement the Corrective Reading program. Regarding the level of the students in his class, Mr. LeBlanc stated, “I think it starts around 2.1 grade level and works up to about a 3, 3.1, maybe higher.” He then talked about his instruction. “We’re working, basically, phonetically through the book.” He observed that the Corrective Reading program “introduces concepts and … vowel combinations and consonant clusters very slowly. They get lots of repetition. They work through individual words and then, through

reading stories." Mr. LeBlanc added, "Some writing is also involved, and some copying." He summed up, "Pretty much, it just progresses very slowly. And that's about all it is."

**Snapshot of Reading Instruction in Language Arts**

Because Mr. LeBlanc also teaches reading in his English/Language Arts class, I observed his reading instruction for English language learners in this class, as well. Many of the students from his reading class are also in this English/Language Arts class. There are nine Latino boys, a few Latino girls, and a few other students who are African American and white. None of these students are study participant. As described earlier, all the students are sitting quietly in their seats. Mr. LeBlanc is circulating, making sure that everyone is either reading their books, writing their questions, or completing other, past-due assignments because grades are due soon.

Once assured that all students are working, Mr. LeBlanc sits on a stool at the front of the class, and begins writing in a notebook. He looks up from time to time, and reminds students to write three questions. After several minutes, Mr. LeBlanc announces that if students read more than 10 chapters in a book, everything beyond that point will count as bonus work. He looks at what Benito, a bilingual student, has written for his three questions. In apparent reaction to the questions Benito has written, Mr. LeBlanc tells the student that what the character in the book had for lunch is not important. Benito responded, "How do I know what is more important?" Mr. LeBlanc answered with a question for the student, "Which–that she ate a hamburger that day or that something came back and chased her—affects the rest of the story?" Benito answered correctly. Mr. LeBlanc gave another example of choosing between two events in a story, and then told the student, "See, you know what is more important! So, you think about what is more important at the end of the chapter." He then continued to circulate.

At the end of the class, Mr. LeBlanc announces that he has a little presentation to make. He asked a few students to describe the behavior of one student in particular at the beginning of the year, and then he talked about the changes in those behaviors he has observed from the start of the year compared to now. Mr. LeBlanc then reads aloud a letter he has just written to the boy's mother about the improvement in behavior and stating how pleased he is with this change. The student in question looks moderately pleased with this act of recognition. Mr. LeBlanc tells the class that he will be writing more of these letters.

Two days later, during the next observation, Mr. LeBlanc is again walking around the room checking students' questions, when he comes to a student who has been writing a report of what happened in his book rather than making up three questions. Mr. LeBlanc stops circulating and approaches the chalkboard, saying, "I'll put up again the words to start a question with: *How, Who, What, Where, When,* and *Why*." He gives specific feedback to the boy who had been writing a book report, asking him, "Who is the main character? What did he get up to do? Those are some examples." Later he talks to Ricardo, a bilingual Latino student who has not been producing work, and who is in danger of failing. He tells the boy, "Let's pick a book you can read," and walks with Ricardo to his classroom bookshelves. Mr. LeBlanc selects a book with large print and big pictures on each page, and has Ricardo read from the first page to see if he can read text at that level. Ricardo is able to read the page, and Mr. LeBlanc tells Ricardo that he wants him to read that book and write a question for each page. Later he checks back with the student and asks him questions about what he has read so far. One student is sent to stand outside the room with his book for a few minutes until Mr. LeBlanc has a moment to talk to him about his behavior expectations. Still later, Mr. LeBlanc checks

with Ricardo again to review the questions he has been creating. Mr. LeBlanc continues to circulate, prodding students to do their work.

Seeing an EL learner, Federico, without a book, Mr. LeBlanc picks a book from his shelves for him to read, and has the student read aloud from it. Federico is unable to read the book, and Mr. LeBlanc selects another, one that has many pictures and large type. This book, too, is difficult for him, as Federico struggles somewhat to read it. Mr. LeBlanc has Federico continue to read aloud and corrects his errors. He asks Federico a few questions about what he is reading. The student's answers are incorrect. Mr. LeBlanc asks Federico to write one question beginning with How, Who, What, When, Where, or Why for each page that has text on it, and then asks Federico to make a question so that he'll know that the student is able to do this. Federico is quiet at first, but with prompting from the teacher, makes up a question. Around the classroom, some students are reading, others are writing questions, while a few quietly play with their fingers or erasers.

Following this observation, Mr. LeBlanc and I chatted for a few minutes, and I commented on his low-key yet generally effective behavior management style. Mr. LeBlanc explained that in the beginning of the year, he had followed the advice of a book popular in the District with new teachers; this "how-to" book advises teachers to give explicit directions for every classroom procedure, even for everyday tasks such as "how to walk over to the trash can." I remarked that he needs to be that explicit with teaching students how to find the main idea of a passage. Mr. LeBlanc retorted, "Yeah, but I didn't have a book tell me that!"

**Teacher's Description of Reading Instruction in Language Arts**

Mr. LeBlanc stated that he sets aside one or sometimes more than one 50-minute period in English/Language Arts each week for the students to sit quietly and read. Using the results from the tests used to place students in the appropriate CR level, Mr. LeBlanc

indicated that he has students check out a book from the library or select one from his classroom library that is at the appropriate reading level. To reduce the possibility that students choose a book that is too difficult to read independently, he has asked the school librarian to provide guidance to his students in selecting books at their level from the library's resources. If the student returns from the library with a book that is too difficult, Mr. LeBlanc has the student choose a book from his classroom library. To ascertain that students can read the book they choose from his own selection, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that he listens while the student reads a paragraph to him; if the student stumbles too often, Mr. LeBlanc steers him to a book written at an easier level.

Mr. LeBlanc related that students read their chosen books on their own, "and it could be books that I've never seen before, and I don't know what they're about," he observed, and then they write "three questions to ask other people, like … quiz questions, as if I were writing them. Three questions, per chapter, on what the story's about." Mr. LeBlanc explained his thinking in asking students to write the questions, stating the following:

> I figure, if they can write questions about it and put the answer next to it, then they're at least getting something out of it. And I'm not able to go back and check for each book, so that was the best way.

Mr. LeBlanc clarified as follows:

> I've focused most of this year on writing, not reading, in language arts. And we have been reading the whole year, but … it's so time consuming to check up on each one of them that I wasn't able to. So I had to pick either reading or writing to really focus on, and they're at such low levels of writing, I think, that I felt that it was time to pull that up. So as far as [reading] instruction, I don't really do much in reading.

In light of the difficulties Mr. LeBlanc's students had experienced earlier in the year with answering a set of teacher-made questions about *The Hobbit*, as well as the reality of his not being able to read every book students might select to read, he

explained, he had decided to go "back to this other idea, just writing out a question. It seems to be working.… They're having a hard time formulating questions, but, even rudimentary questions are at least showing me that some comprehension [is occurring]." He added, "So, that's what I'm going with, and like I said, I'm not really focusing on [reading.]" He has a schedule posted on the board of what is due each Friday, usually the three questions from each of the next couple of chapters. Mr. LeBlanc commented, "It's almost like giving them a worksheet. They'll sit there and do it. And at the end of each chapter, they'll flip back through, write down a couple questions, and then move on."

During our second interview, which was running longer than his conference class period, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that we could continue talking into the next period, which was language arts, "because they're reading today. Which is always [made a funny face]. Very little gets done, but everybody's at least quiet," he concluded with a small laugh.

**Assessing Understanding and Progress**

I asked Mr. LeBlanc in the second interview how he assesses students' growth in reading. He indicated that the special education faculty had assessed all the students with disabilities at the beginning of the year. He added, "But you know, you can listen to a student and remember and get the impression that [for example] she's doing better." Mr. LeBlanc indicated he has observed progress in most of his students since he began using the CR program. "Some kids couldn't have read any of the words they're reading now, in the beginning. There's marked … progress from several [students]." He added, "I can only think of maybe two students who just … haven't gotten it. So, out of, say, 12 kids … they've all gone up, every step of the way. That's pretty good." He continued:

> For my reading students, I can see, if not a marked improvement, at least a little improvement from every one. My language arts students, I've got so many that I haven't really had the time to look at each one that way. But since they're all in reading classes, I'm … hoping that they're moving forward, too.

In the final interview, Mr. LeBlanc stated that, since I had first asked him about monitoring student growth in reading, he has "been paying attention a little bit more." He remarked, "I imagine there are a few [students] that haven't made any progress at all. But for the most part, they have at … least made some progress." In speaking about assessing students' growth, Mr. LeBlanc stated the following:

> Uh, yeah … that's one more thing I need to figure out. I certainly don't assess them as to how much growth that they made. And unless I put in into my curriculum … as such … it really doesn't matter how much growth they've made. Nobody else seems to be tracking them, and [saying] "Alright, you haven't made your .3% of a grade level this year," so. You know, nobody's watching every individual kid, I don't think.

He concluded, "Somebody should be. So, 'How do I assess my students' growth in reading ability?' Well, I don't assess it well enough. Another thing I need to work on." Thus, Mr. LeBlanc appeared to see value in monitoring students' growth, although he acknowledged that the present curriculum would not change based on assessment results, and that, furthermore, he, himself, did not monitor his students' growth.

In the second interview, in our discussion about student progress, I asked Mr. LeBlanc how he monitors the students' understanding of a lesson that he has just taught. He replied as follows:

> Good question. Mostly I monitor production. You know, "Can you show me [that you understand]." I usually have some sort of quiz or test or assignment that will show me if they know what they're doing. I usually keep doing it until they do know it.

In the third interview, Mr. LeBlanc elaborated that if he has a "significant number who just [don't] get it," he will "just keep doing it over and over. Or come back to it, in a week or something."

I asked Mr. LeBlanc about an exchange I had witnessed during one of my observations in which a student had written a question centered on what food the

character was eating rather than information more important to the story's plot. In response to Mr. LeBlanc's criticism of the question he had created, the student had indicated that he was not able to identify which information was more important in the story he was reading. I asked Mr. LeBlanc if he thought the other students were able to identify the main idea or the information that is important in the stories they are reading. "With help they probably are," he responded. "If I ask them questions out of the books they're reading, they probably could answer them correctly.… If I said, 'What's this chapter about?' they probably could tell me, based on either the title or whatever they've read." He acknowledged,

> But I haven't really put that much thought into what the best way to teach that stuff is like—Like I said, I'm still learning this, myself, so.… That's one more thing I have to break down into tiny, tiny parts.

I asked for more information about this accountability technique in the resource language arts class of having his students create "quiz-like" questions based on their readings. I wondered if Mr. Leblanc had taught the students what makes a good question, and asked him about this in the second interview. He stated:

> I initially did not teach them what makes a good question, and I found out quickly that I should have. And I've gone as far now to tell them that it should be a Who, What, When, Where, or Why question, instead of a Yes or No question. I've helped some of them write the questions, but … that's a problem that'll have to be fixed next year.

Mr. LeBlanc talked about his frustration with the nature of the questions his students often created, which had not been improved by his instruction to the students to make their questions similar to ones the class might see on a quiz. He related:

> They'll ask questions like, if a sentence, just any sentence they pick out of the book says … "'I'm going to eat my sandwich," said Nancy.' They might ask their question, "What did Nancy say?" And that'll be their question from the chapter. It's amazing to me.… A quiz question to them is just any old question.

I wondered if students reading the same book ever quizzed each other with their questions, thus establishing an authentic audience for their questions, and posed this question to Mr. LeBlanc. He responded as follows:

> No, they don't. I go back and ask them questions about what they've read, and [sigh] … I don't even look at the questions they write except to see that there are questions and answers. But I ask them questions about what they're reading, and …from what they tell me, I make other questions. But … I just sort of ask them about the book. And most of them say that, "This book is great," … "It's funny," or "Here's a funny part." Or they'll tell me when the good parts come up… So they are reading it.… They're getting somewhere.

Mr. Leblanc talked further about the two methods of using questions as an accountability measure that he had employed at different times. He noted that previously, in the book-on-tape unit, he had supplied students with a series of questions that functioned as a study guide of sorts. He stated, "When I was doing *The Hobbit*, I gave them questions … like worksheets, and … I had questions written down, that they just had to fill in the answer as they listened to it." Mr. LeBlanc continued, "So I never really had them write down their own questions during *The Hobbit*. So, I really have to focus on that." Mr. LeBlanc articulated his perception of the choice before him:

> I guess I might need to focus on which way works better—me asking the questions, which would include the whole class reading the same book, or … teaching them how to ask questions. This is a big one. I'm going to have to really think about that.

In the final interview, Mr. LeBlanc talked about the results of McKinney's students on the post-testing done as part of the Corrective Reading grant. He noted, "[It] turns out that most of [the students] really haven't increased all that much. But speaking for myself, my class can read a whole lot better, at least while they're sitting here with me, than they could before." He remarked, "And that has nothing to do with whether they're primarily English speaking or not. They're all really doing a whole lot better than they were at the beginning of the year." Mr. LeBlanc suggested that the tests the students

took as part of the CR grant may not be able to capture the amount of growth in reading ability he feels his students have made over the course of the school year, as reflected in his comment, "The test they took may or may not be appropriate.… I'm not sure." He elaborated on his reaction to the results of the post-test, stating the following:

> The problem with it is that there's … no test, or at [least] we haven't used the test that covers everything from this book now. We have one that [the students] just read from, and it tells you the level that they're reading at.… [According to] that [test], I think that most of them, it seems they haven't jumped out of the basic level at all.… In class … you know, it's completely different.

## Considerations, Modifications, and Accommodations for EL Learners

### *Planning Considerations*

I asked Mr. LeBlanc if there was anything he needed to consider for his EL Learners when preparing his lesson plans for the reading class. He replied, "No, since our … curriculum is already so set, I really don't have much to think about.… I really don't have anything to think about before we start class." I asked him about any considerations for his English language learners when preparing lesson plans for the reading instruction in the Language Arts class, where the curriculum is not scripted. He reported with a sigh,

> I'm a fairly new teacher.… I find that I'm constantly having to make things more incremental. I'm having to break it down into smaller and smaller pieces until finally I get low enough that … most of them will catch on.… So, I guess … as a curriculum, I have to make sure that I'm not progressing too quickly, and that's my main concern.

He added, "I go at things from several different angles, and if one doesn't work, hopefully the next one will. So, I'm constantly having to reevaluate what I'm teaching." Mr. LeBlanc later clarified that all of his students with LD needed instruction broken down into smaller increments than he expected, not just the EL learners. As for planning modifications or accommodations in his reading instruction for EL learners, in particular, Mr. LeBlanc reported, "I don't have that in mind when I do my lesson plans."

***Modifications and Accommodations***

In terms of modifying his reading instruction for students, Mr. LeBlanc stated that "during the lesson … I change it up a little bit. I've modified it some—I've made it more fun for them than just rote." The changes included incorporating an element of competition into some of the activities. However, in terms of modifying lessons or instruction specifically for the EL Learners, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that he doesn't modify lessons or instruction for second language learners, and that he "just treat[s]them like regular LD kids." He added, "I don't *do* anything different." In an effort to member check with Mr. LeBlanc about the nature and extent of the modifications he makes, I asked him in a follow-up question to talk about whether he had considered the characteristics of the EL Learners in his lesson planning before the curriculum was as structured as it is in the CR program. Mr. LeBlanc was quiet for a moment then remarked, "Maybe from time to time, but not overall. Not as a general thing." I asked Mr. LeBlanc in a follow-up question to this statement what would trigger his implementing a modification, that is, what would cause him to think about whether a lesson or activity would work with the EL Learners in particular. He was quiet for a moment, then said, "The only time I ever really think about it is when I know a certain student has trouble with the English language." He elaborated as follows:

> I have a student who is probably more able than the rest [of the students] in the class to do the work but he doesn't necessarily do much at all because—there may be several reasons, but one reason is because it's hard for him to understand. … So for him, and … situations like that, I consider it at least before I'll [get to] class.

I asked Mr. LeBlanc specifically if the EL learners ever needed more support or repetition to be successful, and Mr. LeBlanc replied, "Sure. [But] I don't think that they necessarily need more support and repetition than the other LD kids. All of the kids in

these classes need more support and repetition … than the book asks you to do. So, just overall, a blanket, 'Yes.'"

Though Mr. LeBlanc stated that he did not "do anything" specifically for his EL learners, I was able to identify two accommodations that Mr. LeBlanc mentioned he makes for the EL learners in the course of our interviews, both of which he did in acknowledgement of the students' status as second language learners. First, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that he moderates his speech for the EL learners, using simpler language so that students will understand. Second, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that he allows Spanish-speakers in his English/Language Arts class to complete their reading assignment in a Spanish language book, should they request to do so. He allows this despite his admission that, because he does not speak Spanish, he cannot really "tell if they know it or not," making it difficult to judge the quality of the questions and answers students generate and turn in for their class work grade.

However, in our final interview, Mr. LeBlanc reported that this accommodation did not always have the desired outcome, in that the student who most recently had asked to read a book in Spanish "didn't ever finish that book, and he didn't ever do what I asked him to do with that book. But he said he understood it better, so I let him go. [But] he didn't ever do it." Mr. LeBlanc remarked, "So, I finally went back to an English book that was [at] a much lower [level]. And [the student]x was able to do some of the stuff. So, I don't know what the answer is." Thus, Mr. LeBlanc's strategy to accommodate an English-language learner's stated language preference did not result in the student producing better quality work. Mr. LeBlanc subsequently had the student revert to reading in English, where he could at least assess the student's ability to read and understand.

## LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

In speaking of his satisfaction with the CR program in terms of his EL learners' progress, Mr. LeBlanc stated, "The program we're doing now, I think is working." He reflected, "It's set at a certain pace. I'm not sure if that pace is … necessarily fast enough, or even slow enough for some of them—'cause some of them are getting it, and some of them are being a little bit left behind." He remarked, "But, really, what can you do, to cover every kid. I don't know if there is an approach that you can do that." Mr. LeBlanc summed up, "So, I think … as a whole … it's working as well as … we can expect."

Because Mr. LeBlanc had commented in our first interview that some of the EL Learners can read "very well in Spanish" while others did not know the sound system at all, I asked him a follow-up question as to whether he felt the curriculum was effective with students at either end of the skills spectrum. He replied, "I'm not sure. I haven't really spent time thinking about that." He continued after a pause, "The curriculum we're using now seems to be helping across the board." Mr. LeBlanc anticipated, however, that the students with higher skills might not be learning as much as those with lower skills because the more capable readers already have many of the skills taught in the CR curriculum. He explained, "Some of [the students] probably are learning at a … much lower rate … [because] they already know the alphabet, they already know the sounds. They're not really *learning* so much … and they're only progressing at the same speed as the other kids are." Mr. LeBlanc concluded, "I guess, to summarize, I don't really know."

In light of his responses regarding his satisfaction with the programs at McKinney Middle School to teach reading to EL Learners with LD, I asked Mr. LeBlanc whether he was satisfied with what he was seeing in terms of both the rate and amount of progress among his EL Learners. He replied, "No, but I think … the problems lie with my instruction more than … anything else." Thus, Mr. LeBlanc perceived his instruction as a

factor in the progress his EL learners were making in reading. He elaborated, "I imagine that, I pray that in the future, as I get better and as I learn what they need, that I'll be able to help them more. And so, let's say five years from now, if you would be asking me this question, I could give you some definite answers."

In looking ahead, I asked Mr. LeBlanc if he were planning any changes or additions to the CR program for next year. He observed, "I don't know if I'd change anything overall." Mr. LeBlanc reasserted his satisfaction with the program in a later interview during member checking, affirming, "I certainly wouldn't mess with the program we're using now." He coughed and remarked, "Except I have taken certain parts and made it more interesting, into competitions, and stuff like that."

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In our initial discussion regarding his satisfaction with what the school is doing in regards to EL learners with LD, Mr. LeBlanc had commented on the "small availability of teachers" on the campus and had stated that it "would be better" if there were "five or six different options" rather than only two programs to choose from. I followed up on this thread in the second interview, asking Mr. LeBlanc what he had meant with these comments. He replied, "It's my opinion that many of the kids who are LD or have other disabilities … need far more one-on-one attention than we're able to give them." He noted, "Also, the people who give the tests to determine what their disabilities are—there are only a handful in the district who actually do that. And so *many* kids, that sometimes, probably, the faster [the diagnosticians] get them in and out, the better, to them. So, I don't know if every child is getting as much help as he needs." He amended this statement in our final interview, asserting, "I'm *sure* they're not getting as much help as they need.… I'm *positive* that each kid needs more help than he's actually getting." Mr. LeBlanc affirmed, "The ultimate plan would be … to have really small classes. If we had

20 special ed teachers in this school, every kid would be learning a lot better. It's simple, if you want to look at it that way."

Mr. LeBlanc had ideas about other ways to help EL Learners progress in their reading. He raised the issue of the involvement and support of the family, stating, "Having something going on at home.… Force parents to read to them, or read with them …. But you know, you just can't do that, so, yes … there's other things we should be doing, but, just can't have it that way." He then posed a question to me, asking, "Are there any other things we should be doing that can happen, and aren't? I don't know. Do you know if anyone's tracking the ELL kids' progress in this school?" He added, "It would be nice if someone were to track their progress.… Just to let us know what's going on. Even if we're not going to address it, necessarily." Thus, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that tracking the progress of EL learners and making that information available to teachers is something the school could do, even though he did not necessarily foresee using that information.

I wondered how Mr. LeBlanc envisioned his and the school's responsibility towards the EL learners with LD. I asked Mr. LeBlanc whether he felt the school had a responsibility to move EL learners forward in their ability to handle academic English. "Sure, basically," he replied. "I don't think it's all, [that the] complete responsibility [is] heaped on our shoulders. The students have to take some sort of responsibility." Thus, Mr. LeBlanc saw responsibility for student progress as shared between teacher and students.

In a discussion about the rate of progress observed among his EL Learners with LD, Mr. LeBlanc appeared unsure of his responsibility toward these students. He appeared to see two distinct paths for the focus of his instruction, as reflected in the following remark: "I'm wondering what our job is, really, with these special groups of

kids, like ELL kids. Is it my job to have them learn English? [Or] is it my job to teach them what everybody else is teaching them?" I asked if by this he meant teaching subject content. "Right." He added, "I really don't treat them any differently than the other students. That's why I'm answering these [questions] so wishy-washy. But I very rarely consider their language as any different from the other kids." Though unsure which path he should follow, Mr. LeBlanc had chosen to focus on teaching content and subsequently to essentially disregard the language factor. He commented to me, "I guess you're going to figure [it] out, or … I wonder if it should be addressed at all. Is this something we need to worry about? Along with [everything else?]" In the final interview, Mr. LeBlanc stated, "I'm going to say my responsibility … what I think it is, is just to have them progress. And … I don't necessarily think it has to be a certain amount. I'm sure we'd like it to be all the way up to regular. Certainly, I guess, my responsibility is to keep them from regressing. And try to teach them *something*." He added, "I'm not sure exactly how far I'm supposed to go.… You're the first person who's ever asked me these questions. I never had to consider that before."

## Ms. Constance Bautista

### CULTURAL HISTORY AND PRIOR TEACHING EXPERIENCES

As noted earlier, Ms. Bautista identified herself as a Pacific Islander; she was the only participant who, exposed to two languages (Chamoru and English) from an early age, had experienced living in a bilingual community. Though the island she grew up on had been governed by the United States since the end of the 19th century, the people had continued to speak their native language freely, because, reported Ms. Bautista, "for the most part, the military stayed separate from the civilian government. Except for whatever was done in governmental business. That was always done in English. So … the families

went home and spoke [Chamoru] at home." That practice changed with World War II. Ms. Bautista's parents, fluent in both English and Chamoru, had been young during World War II, when the island had been taken over. The United States had routed the enemy, and Ms. Bautista reflected on the subsequent shift in language use, commenting as follows:

> After the war, I guess to show patriotism and loyalty … the Chamorus wanted to give back to the United State because we were, quote unquote, "saved," by, liberated by the Americans. So to show our appreciation, they wanted to enforce that [the speaking of English], and unfortunately, I am of that generation.

Ms. Bautista noted, "I could have been a native language speaker [of] Chamoru." However, as a result of the shift in language policy, she grew up at a time when the speaking of Chamoru was banned in school and discouraged in general. The socio-political climate had changed from one where both languages were accepted to one where the native language was, for all intents and purposes, banned. She observed, "I remember as young as, I think three years old, being punished. Physically. You know, spanked, I guess." She explained:

> I had a couple of military uncles….They were really strict, and by the rules, and that type of thing…. Even at the home, so that we can grow up being good English speakers. I got punished. Physically. So I think, that's a psychological block for me.

Thus, English became the preferred language not only of education and all government- and military-related institutions and services on the island, but also among family members within the home. Ms. Bautista reminisced about her early youth, stating,

> The only person I was able to speak freely [in] Chamoru [with], and I remember that distinctly, was my grandmother. And she would just have this really sweet smile on her face because I would be butchering some of the pronunciations, but she understood.

Ms. Bautista's grandparents spoke only Chamoru, and thus, use of the indigenous language was necessary for communication between the generations.

Ms. Bautista talked further about the socio-political history of her people and how they had been "subjugated by the … Spanish colonists … hundreds of years ago," which had an impact on her own identity. She recounted the following:

> "We [Chamoru] have a very strong Spanish influence. I didn't mention that, did I?… I'm actually Hispanic.… For purposes of purity, I'm Hispanic.… [My island] was colonized by the Spaniards 400 years [ago]. Magellan came to the island as one of … the stops in the shipping routes, and they colonized [my island]. Twenty-five years of … genocide [ensued]. They tried to destroy the Chamoru people through the males.

Ms. Bautista described the important role women had had in the maintenance of the Chamoru language and culture after the colonization by the Spaniards. She affirmed that, though the Spaniards had tried to eradicate the Chamoru people by killing the men, their success was circumscribed due to "their mistake [of] keeping the females." She reflected, "And so that's how the … Chamoru culture, the indigenous culture, was able to be sustained—the language was through … the women. And they kept that, I guess, as a passive aggressive resistance to the Spanish male Dons." She articulated points of similarity and differences between the culture of her people and the culture of the Spanish, adding, "[Chamoru culture is] strongly influenced by Spanish values … so we value family, we value that connection.… Although … the Spanish culture is very patrilineal, [and] we are a matrilineal society.… Because the children inherit through the mothers." Thus, Ms. Bautista displayed knowledge of the history of her cultural and ethnic community, and in particular, of the effects of the colonization by the Spanish still evident in Chamoru culture. She was the only participant who talked at length about her own culture, the history of her ethnic group, and, as will be revealed later, about the culture of her students.

In discussing her experience with second language learners prior to the year of the study, Ms. Bautista remarked that when she had taught on her island, her students "would

go in and out of the Chamoru language, and I never thought anything about it." She explained, "So, the idea was not that they were English-language learners: They've already learned English. They were just a part of that population of bilingual students." In this respect, her Chamoru students were fluent bilinguals, not Limited English Proficient, as were some of the students she taught at McKinney.

## TEACHING READING AT MCKINNEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Ms. Bautista talked about her reading instruction the previous year, before the school adopted the CR program. She had taught an 8th grade reading class which had included students with a range of reading abilities, from non-readers up to students reading at the 4th grade level and possibly higher. She noted several challenges to providing effective instruction for this heterogeneous group, including the fact that "there was not any organization with the leveling." She sighed and recounted the following:

> It was a … scrounge and grab…. We had these little books that we would read. And it was really hard to find low-level readers … that were interesting, that I had lots of copies of.… It would be worksheets. We'll have stories, short stories and we will bubble in. We'll do some reading.… I had a lot of books. We would have sustained silent reading at least once a week, for 15 minutes, where all they did was nothing but read. No questions asked, just grab a book that you feel comfortable [with], and you're going to read for 15 minutes.… So it was a catch-as-catch-can type of thing.… There was no curriculum.

The lack of curriculum guidelines that would effectively address the needs of students reading significantly below grade level, compounded by the range in ability among students, had rendered her task of identifying and putting together activities and materials to improve students' reading a complex and challenging task. "It was a very frustrating experience—trying to teach reading from worksheets," she concluded. These problems disappeared when the school adopted the CR program; Ms. Bautista and other selected teachers at McKinney began teaching the program October 1st of the year of the study.

Though not listed among the initiatives posted on McKinney Middle School's website, the Corrective Reading (CR) program had recently been adopted and was being taught by several teachers at McKinney; the school was just one of several middle schools in the District that were participating in a new grant initiative to improve reading levels through use of the CR program. Ms. Bautista described how the school came to adopt CR. She reported that she and the special education department chairperson at McKinney Middle School had been invited to a Science Research Associates (SRA) presentation early in the fall of the year of the study. She recounted, "So when I went back and found out that this was the same program [as that used by her teachers in her homeland], I'm going … after 20 years, and it's still here, it's got a track record." She talked about the support in the research for the effectiveness of the Corrective Reading Program as follows:

> There's a … coalition of organizations that did studies on best practices, and they have recommended twenty-five of the best … programs, to teach all kinds of things. … Direct Instruction was one of the whole school reform programs that was being touted by a coalition of … teachers' unions and administrators' organizations, and professional … whatever.… There's a whole bunch of them that … supported this … study.

Ms. Bautista remarked, "I said, 'Let's give it a try.'" She added with a grimace, "I mean it's better than having to pull out something out of the [thin air], you know. And," she added, "It required us to put these students at levels." Thus, she seemed to indicate a positive aspect of the program was the requirement to group students into classes according to their skill levels, resulting in more homogeneous classes than those she had taught in previous years.

Ms. Bautista detailed the range of assessments, all in English, the faculty had administered to students in order to place them in the most appropriate level of the Corrective Reading program. "We gave all of the students three different assessments.

The first assessment was to place them in this [level]." According to the number of words students read correctly, they were placed in a particular level of the program, such as B1, the level Ms. Bautista taught. Next, the students were administered the Reading Level Indicator (RLI) (Williams, 2000) to "get their instructional and … independent [reading] levels." Finally, students took a fluency test to ascertain how many words per minute they were able to read correctly.

Ms. Bautista noted that the profile revealed by the different assessments is "not exact, but it's within the range of where they … are." A few students had been placed in her B1 classroom, though their assessments indicated skills at a lower level, because the number of students at McKinney needing the lowest level of the CR program, which the McGraw-Hill web document (n.d.) indicates is appropriate for nonreaders, was too great for the one section that had been scheduled. Ms. Bautista noted that, in addition to being implemented as the reading curriculum in resource reading classes, the CR program is being used in general education reading classes at McKinney with students deemed to need intensive reading instruction to supplement the instruction those students receive in their general education English/language arts classroom.

**The Classroom Context**

In a corner at the far end of the deep room as one enters is Ms. Bautista's desk; a chalkboard and a podium occupy the central area at this end of the room. Another chalkboard, bulletin boards, and file cabinets line the left side of the deep room. In this instructional space are approximately six to eight long tables, with chairs, arranged in two columns. There are two seats per table, both on the same side of the table so that all students face the teacher and the chalkboard. This is where the reading and language arts classes are conducted. Ms. Bautista's classroom also doubles as the "kitchen" for her cooking class. Against the near wall of the room as one enters—the back of the room—

are the cook stove, cupboards, sinks, and counters of her kitchen. This is where she teaches her cooking skills class. Tall cupboards and a table visually and functionally divide the two instructional areas of the room.

**The Classroom Community**

There are 9-10 seventh and eighth graders in the room, seated at six tables arranged parallel to the board at the front of the room. Seated at the tables were four Latino students for whom I had permission to review folders (Vigail, an 8th grader, and Carlos, José, and Gilberto, all 7th graders), two other Latinos who were not participants in the study, two African American students, and two students who were white. The reading-related goals in the most recent IEPs in the students' folders (most of which were established at annual special education IEP meetings held in May of the year prior to the study) indicated that three of the target Latino students (Vigail, Carlos, and Gilberto) were deemed to be functioning between the 2nd and 3rd grade levels for the year underway while the goals of the fourth student (Jose) did not indicate grade levels for reading skills. In terms of anticipated testing levels in the area of reading for the formal, state-wide assessment to be administered in late April, many of the students' folders indicated testing was to be accomplished with the State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA; this is a test the state administers to students receiving special education in lieu of the assessment taken by students in the general education program when the IEP committee deems the alternative assessment a more appropriate means to measure academic progress). The fourth student, José, was to be tested with the Brigance, on which he was expected to achieve at the 5th grade level.

Ms. Bautista indicated Vigail had reported she was born in Mexico and had moved to the United States at the age of 4. The records available in Vigail's educational folder began with 5th grade, and indicated she had received ESL and bilingual education

upon entering the District. Vigail failed both the math and reading sections of the state-wide assessment in the spring of 5th grade. At McKinney Middle School, in the fall of her 6th grade, she was evaluated for special education services and found to meet eligibility criteria for a learning disability. On the school and health information form that parents completed as part of the special education identification process, Vigail's mother indicated that Vigail had been struggling in school for years. The year of the study, Vigail was to be tested with the State Developed Alternative Test in both reading and math at the 2nd grade level.

School records in Carlos's special educational folder indicated he had attended kindergarten in south Texas, then attended part of 1st and 2nd grades in Chicago before arriving in the current district where he has continued his education. In Chicago, Carlos had been dismissed from speech services in the beginning of 2nd grade, then evaluated for a learning disability two months later, and began receiving bilingual special education services as a student with a learning disability later that same year.

Notes from Carlos's IEP meeting in March of 5th grade indicated he was "just beginning to write and spell in English" at that time. His 5th grade teacher wrote that Carlos's word recognition and listening comprehension in Spanish were at grade level, though his reading comprehension, spelling, and written expression in Spanish, at the 2nd grade level, were significantly below his grade placement. She indicated that Carlos's reading, writing, and spelling in English were at kindergarten-1st grade level, and she recommended extra time and support in English. The year the study took place, Carlos was to be tested at grade 2 in reading, grade 3 in writing, and grade 4 in math, all with the State's alternative assessment.

José's folder indicated that in his early school years, he had moved back and forth between the US and Mexico, with records indicating he had attended kindergarten in both

Mexico and in North Carolina; and similarly, had attended 2nd grade first in Mexico, then in Greenriver ISD. As a result, José was approximately a year older than the other participating 7th grade students, and two months older than the participating 8th grader. José's schooling in Mexico was described as "sporadic." Though evaluated for a learning disability at the beginning of 3rd grade due to below grade-level reading and written expression, no significant discrepancy had been found, and thus, he did not qualify for special education as a student with a learning disability at that time, although he did qualify as having a speech impairment. (In fact, Ms. Bautista discovered after talking with the McKinney MS campus speech diagnostician late in the year of the study that José had a speech fluency disorder which at times caused a lag or delay in his spoken replies [rather than the more common disfluency of stuttering]). While in a bilingual program and receiving bilingual speech services in 5th grade, José had been tested again that spring and found to meet eligibility criteria with a learning disability; the committee recommended resource language arts and resource math for 6th grade. A note related to assessment done at that time indicated that José was able to decode multisyllabic words.

Notes entered in the IEP at a meeting in the fall of José's 6th grade at McKinney (the year prior to the study) indicated that his social studies teacher had reported that José exhibited difficulties comprehending instruction in English and expressing himself in English; his ESL teacher reported that he was doing well in his ESL-language arts class, and she recommended he stay there. The notes further indicated, "José does well in Spanish, and remains dominant in Spanish." The IEP committee recommended a schedule change to ESL-Science, ESL-social studies, ESL-language arts, and that José continue with his bilingual math enrichment class. That 6th grade IEP committee recommended that José take the state-wide assessment in reading at grade level in Spanish, though they exempted him in math. I was not able to locate results of that grade-

level assessment in Spanish; however, a year later (the year of the study), José was scheduled to take the Brigance in reading and the State Developed Alternative Test in math, and expected to achieve at the 5th grade level in both. The IEP modification sheet for José's 7th grade indicated instructions and directions should be clarified and to "use Spanish when needed only."

Gilberto was originally from Guatemala. Information in the folder indicated Gilberto had attended the same school in Greenriver for all of his elementary schooling. His 5th grade schooling had been in a 3-4-5 multi-grade level classroom. He had been evaluated in January and met criteria for special education services as a student with a learning disability; at that time, Gilberto's reading grade levels in Spanish ranged from late 1st- to late 3rd-grade, and in English from early 1st-to early 2nd –grade. Spanish was considered Gilberto's dominant language. His teacher noted in the IEP that Gilberto was a bilingual student who she felt "was forced to transition to English too soon—in 2nd grade." The year the study took place, Gilberto was to be tested on the State Developed Alternative Test at the 2nd grade level in reading and writing, and at 5th grade in math. Thus, the IEPs in place at the time of the study indicated the EL Learners in Ms. Bautista's reading class were reading from two to five years below grade placement.

**Teacher's Perceptions of Students' Language**

I first asked Ms. Bautista to talk about her impression of her EL learners' conversational English. She began with a description of the language of José, Carlos, and also Ernesto, who, though not a target student, nonetheless was an EL learner who usually spoke Spanish in the class, as follows:

> Their English is functional. That's not even conversation. Because you had stated earlier they come to school and they converse in the language that they're learning. That's not the case with these kids. Every opportunity they have, they revert to Spanish. Outside, you don't hear them conversing in English. So there is

> no reinforcement of that skill that they're learning. … So … the only kind of English that I can think of is functional. [They are only able to] ask … the teacher … "May I sharpen my pencil?"…. "May I go to the restroom?" "What page are we on?"

She reiterated, "Their English is functional … [just] survival skills. [But] to converse and have a … relaxed conversation is beyond them." Thus, Ms. Bautista indicated she had seen little improvement in the three described, who, she asserted, speak little English in the classroom.

Ms. Bautista spoke about the remaining English-language learners in turn. Specifically, she stated that Gilberto "struggles with it a little bit, but he does converse," which she attributed to the fact that "he doesn't congregate with mainly Spanish speakers, 'cause when he comes to school, he usually goes down to the band room to … get his equipment and set up and so forth." Vigail, Ms. Bautista stated, is "not as good as [Gilberto], but she's much better than the three of these guys. But, [Vigail], too, congregates with the … Spanish speakers. Right out here, and that's all they do, speak Spanish."

Ms. Bautista indicated that it was her perception that this low level of proficiency in interpersonal communication in English has repercussions beyond not being able to hold a conversation in English. She stated, "The conversational [ability] is not proficient, therefore, the academic [performance] suffers. There seems to be a direct correlation to that." In terms of the academic English skills of her students, such as their ability to read a book in the classroom, Ms. Bautista stated, "It doesn't translate. Because they're not comfortable with [academic English]. They're not able to [read a book.] It's difficult for them to follow along."

In light of Ms. Bautista's comment that José struggles the most with the reading and small amount of writing required in her class, I asked Ms. Bautista what she

anticipates in terms of expected student abilities when she learns that she will be teaching a student who was recently exited from ESL. She replied, "My expectation is that at some point he should have been proficient enough to handle the materials outside in a regular classroom. But, in José's case … it's just not translating." I asked how she thought a recently exited ESL student might perform academically in the classroom. She replied, "Again, it correlates to that expectation of proficiency. That they can be able to handle the instructions that I give them, every which way that I give them—abbreviated …[or] long-winded." Ms. Bautista indicated that the decision to exit a student from ESL should be based on the student's achieving a minimum level of English proficiency, which she does not believe is evident with José. She attributed some of his difficulties to his self-proclaimed inability to do the work in English, though she appeared to believe he could do more than he seemed to believe himself capable of doing.

The language in which students conversed with each other was a topic that came up many times in our discussions. Ms. Bautista remarked that several students in the class spoke Spanish at every available opportunity. She reported:

> They're always speaking in Spanish. And I get on their case about it. I said, "If it can't be said in English, then you don't need to say it right now." But they still do it. And I said … "Speak English, Speak English."… . It's gotten to the point where we have to say, "English only." And then they … become resistant, and … then, you know, there's that power struggle. "I want to use my language," and … I can't do anything about it.

I asked Ms. Bautista if the students argued with her about speaking Spanish. She replied:

> Yeah! Well, not argue, but they'll question. "Why do …?" "Why don't …"? In fact, in the beginning … they would tell each other, "She doesn't want you speaking Spanish." I said, "No, you … misunderstand [me]. It's not that I don't want you to speak Spanish. I think being bilingual [is good]. Speaking another language is wonderful.… It'll help you in the future, to have two languages. But you also have to be good at the *other* language. You *are* in *America*."

The preference to speak Spanish of one student in particular seemed to puzzle Ms. Bautista. She related, "[Carlos] is the enigma there. He was raised [in the U.S.], he was born in northern United States.… He's always been in the United States." She indicated that Carlos's sister is proficient in English and Spanish, and is learning Latin, as well. "But Carlos insists that things have to be … in Spanish." "He just says, 'I can't learn, I can't.' But he was born in Chicago!" she added with an expression of confused disbelief. She added, "He's never lived in … Mexico for a long period of time. I've asked him.… His mother's a … Spanish speaker. I don't know.… I can make some assumptions, but that's all they are."

Ms. Bautista expressed strong feelings about Carlos's preferred use of the Spanish language. She commented as follows:

> [Carlos] wants to be a Spanish speaker. And I said, "That's wonderful. Speak Spanish all you want. You can speak many different languages. But for our purposes, in my classroom, this is …. For our purposes, we need to learn to be better writers in English, and better readers in English, okay. I can't accommodate you all, in your Spanish, whatever, you know. 'Cause the world is made up of people who speak other than Spanish as a different language. But for our purposes here, I will tell you, and I'll tell you again. English is what we have to speak. We're going to learn in English, and I'll help you learn what you need to learn, in English."

She added, "[Ernesto is] of the same mind that the other two [Carlos and José] are about Spanish. 'We've got to speak Spanish. We got to hold on to the mother tongue' [drama in her voice]." She asserted the following:

> "You're in another situation, guys."… It's not politically correct to say this, but since I can, because I come from a different culture, that I think that the people who have that kind of attitude need to rethink, seriously. And they have to have a conversation with the families of these … kids. Maybe they should pull them in, and … drill it into them: "You're in the United States. And you need to survive in the United States. And part of that survival is proficiency in the English language."

Ms. Bautista elaborated on her interpretation of this perceived sense of entitlement on the part of students, saying, "You know … 'I'm going to speak my language. And everything else around me can [grimace], you know, circulate.' 'I can pass my grades, I can pass … an American school, not speaking English.'" She added, "It's not right!"

Ms. Bautista noted, "I come from a multicultural society, community.… And one of the things that those who don't speak English learn when they get there to the island is that they need to learn English because they're in America. No ifs, ands, or buts about it." She reiterated her opinion that "maybe the system needs to have conversations with parents. Identify these children who still have that problem. And begin to talk with their parents."

### TEACHER'S KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT "GOOD" READING INSTRUCTION

When asked what she *knew* about reading instruction for EL learners, Ms. Bautista replied, "Nothing." She continued as follows:

> Sometimes nothing is good. Because, you know, here's what I think. If I knew all of these other things, that's just going to be a way … to make allowances, for making excuses … putting the obstacles. "Oh, they're doing this because they're ELLs." Or, "They're doing this because of, whatever."

Ms. Bautista asserted, "Well. This is the way it is. We need to learn to read. This is the structure of learning how to read. Let's get on board. Not, get derailed with all of this ELLs, and LDs, and you know." She noted, "At some point … it may be a factor, especially if you're a … as I said, dysgraphic, dyslexic, or … whatever. But that's not the case with these students." Referring to the testing that had occurred and the subsequent homogeneous leveling of classes, Ms. Bautista concluded, "Whatever it is that their problems are, it has all allowed them to be at this level together. Okay, so we're going to cover it." Thus, with students grouped according to their common skill deficits identified through assessments, Ms. Bautista appeared to have confidence that, whether the student

was an English-language learner or a native English speaker, the instruction would effectively teach the skills to the students, thus indicating that, for the most part, instruction that was effective for native English speakers also was effective with the EL learners.

When I asked Ms. Bautista to talk about her *understanding* of good reading instruction for EL learners with identified disabilities, she responded, "Oh, I think I have to study for this test!" Then she responded to the question, stating, "You know, I don't discriminate—good or bad, I don't know." She continued, "I don't discriminate between … English-language learners, LD students, or those students who need to learn to read." She elaborated as follows:

> Reading English has a structure. You start with the phonetics, the phonetic awareness, and then you move onto the phonics and the sounds, and the blending, and then you move onto the … Then the whole world of reading opens up to you. And that's the progression that I see.

She summed up her position, "So, it's like, everybody's equal in … the treatment … of the cure…. We just move on from there." Ms. Bautista stated that if the students are "not at that point where they've opened up into the world of reading because they're so resistant," then she "go[es] back to, 'Ok.… You have these huge gaps of … skills that you have not [mastered], that you've missed for some reason. Whatever [those reasons] are, we're not going to dwell on it," she stated. "We're going to move on." Thus, Ms. Bautista appeared to focus her full energies on providing instruction to remediate the presenting skill gaps; the various student-based characteristics such as second language status and/or disability did not appear to be considered factors that would affect her reading instruction.

I asked Ms. Bautista whether she found herself needing to do anything differently with the English language learners. She took a deep breath and then was quiet. I

prompted, “Or do they seem to get it … as well as the native English speakers?” She answered, “They do. Except for two.” She mused that the source of the problem for the two students who continued to struggle might be in where they had been born, but then recalled that while one of the two had been born in Mexico, the other had been born in a large, mid-western American city.

I asked her to consider if the problem seemed to be related more to language or to a disability. She thought for a minute and mentioned the gains she has observed in her other EL learners, then posited, “The problem that I have [is that] … one [student (José)] … has been able to bamboozle everybody else to allow him [to get by without doing the work].” She continued, “What I have seen is, ‘Ay, no, Miss. No sé.’ He doesn’t understand, he doesn’t want [to do it].” Ms. Bautista related how she handled this, stating, “And I would just say, ‘I really don’t care what you want, you’re going to do it [laugh].… It’s a matter of pushing and expectation.” She went on, “He knows it’s expected of him. And I’m not going to get out of his face… I’m not going to go away until he gives it to me. So, he is saying a lot more in English than he would.” Thus, in the case of José, Ms. Bautista had found that holding the student accountable for participating in English in the day’s academic activities had resulted in an increase in his following through and in producing more English. She noted ruefully, however, that this student is “still … rattling off in Spanish, you know, every time he turns around.”

Ms. Bautista appeared to consider instruction at students’ instructional level as best, an element that she suggested was missing from students’ previous reading instruction. She reported that good instruction “[starts] right where they are.” She added, “And that’s how they came into … my class.…We gave all of the students three different assessments.” She asserted, “Teach them where they’re at—teach those skills.” She related, “For a lot of these students, they’re finally operating at their instructional level.

And that's where they want to be and … that's the idea. We get them at their instructional level and they move faster."

In subsequent member-checking, Ms. Bautista modified her earlier position about appropriate instruction for EL learners with LD in which she had talked about the possibility of becoming "derailed with all of this ELLs, and LDs, and you know." In member checking my understanding of her response, Ms. Bautista reported, "I still believe that, but as we're going along, I'm seeing [that] they're automatically … derailing themselves, as I'm seeing with José." Thus, despite her efforts not to get "derailed" by language or disability factors, she had come to realize that some of the students were "derailing themselves," and hence, not making expected gains.

Similarly, Ms. Bautista later clarified her position on not "discriminating" between EL learners and native English speakers, stating that though she had not discriminated when she initially began the program, there may be a point at some time when such differentiation might be called for. She also modified her stance that instruction for EL learners does not need to differ from instruction designed for native English-speaking students with LD. In clarifying her more recent understanding, she began by restating her belief that the CR program can be effective in teaching reading skills to her students, but reiterated her earlier comment that the presence of disabilities other than LD was a factor that might be a "problem," as evident in her following comment:

> For some reason, I've changed my thinking on that, in that the reading instruction can teach those skills … that need to be learned for reading … [but] if the learning disability of the student is so great that they're dysgraphic or dyslexic, you know, then we have a different problem.

Then, in a statement that appeared to reflect an effort to reconcile her belief in the effectiveness of the reading program with the difficulty she saw some students continuing

to experience, she shared her observations of her students with learning disabilities who are EL learners. She commented as follows:

> But in terms of … a lot of the basic skills, the phonetic skills, it really shouldn't matter, except that I'm learning … especially with the Spanish-language students, they have a hard time with our … vowels. Which…. I'd heard about it, but it's really, really difficult for them now that we're getting into the digraphs and the vowel digraphs … and the blends.… It's very hard for them to distinguish.

In apparent recognition of the interplay of learning disabilities and second language learner status, she added, "Especially, they're learning disabled *and* English language learners."

Finally, Ms. Bautista indicated that reading instruction for EL learners with LD might best be provided in a separate setting from where the native English speakers received instruction. She stated, "Perhaps for next year what we need to do is, try and keep the class for the English language learners in special ed reading in one group, and … all others in another group." She indicated that this instruction "should go more slowly, and spend more time on spelling and vocabulary." She asserted, "I know they're going to need more practice in spelling those words, [and] using the words more in context."

## CONTENT AND METHODS OF TEACHER'S READING INSTRUCTION

### Snapshot of Instruction in the Reading Class

Ms. Bautista has written 10 words up on the chalkboard: *beater*, *melted*, *hammer*, *shelly*, *fake*, *beginning*, *corn*, *flash*, *cheered*, *heap*. She instructs students to copy the spelling words. Then the lesson begins with Ms. Bautista teaching the sounds of letters, using a direct instruction methodology. Students have the Corrective Reading workbook open in front of them as the teacher says, "First sound: /ch/. What sound?" Students answer chorally, "/ch/." "Right!" Ms. Bautista says. "Write it!" Students write the letters

representing that sound in a dictation exercise in the workbook. “Next sound: /sh/. What sound?” asks Ms. Bautista. “/Sh/,” respond the students. This pattern is repeated for /e/, /or/, /a/, /m/, /b/, /s/, /f/, and /p/.

Next the students are directed to do an exercise in the workbook that presents the students with a list of words with endings; students are required to write the words as they appear with the endings removed. Ms. Bautista alerts the students, “The last letter you’ll write is silent *e*.” Ms. Bautista circulates around the room, checking on several students’ progress. She provides more assistance to those who seem to need it, and gives a mini-lesson to one EL learner on the pattern in the English language of adding a silent *e* once an ending is dropped (e.g., *leaving* becomes *leave*). She circulates again and checks to see that all students are doing this correctly.

Students are directed to put up their workbooks, and to open their student Corrective Reading books. The activity they begin next requires students to decode two to three letters that make one sound (digraphs, consonant clusters, r-controlled vowels, etc.) and then correctly pronounce a word containing those letters. The teacher begins by asking the class, “What sound?” “/ /,” the students respond. “What word?” “peeking,” they respond. They follow this pattern for /ck/, /or/, /er/, /ea/, and /ing./ Then the teacher has each row of students run through the sounds and words as a team, then, finally, each student is asked to identify the sounds and words. After each student completes his or her turn correctly, Ms. Bautista rewards the student with a yellow strip of paper that the students can accumulate and exchange for rewards.

The next activity consists of reading a short passage. Each student takes a turn reading a sentence or two. Some are not following along, and don’t know where their place is when the teacher calls on them. One student refuses to read, apparently because she wanted to go the nurse but was not allowed to. Ms. Bautista asks basic

comprehension questions about the passage as they go along. In the last five minutes of class, Ms. Bautista lets students finish working in their workbooks. Some days include a partner reading activity, whereby students team up with another student and, with a timer running, take turns reading the passage. Partner 1 reads aloud while Partner 2, who is listening while following along, is responsible for recording how many errors Partner 1 made. Then the teammates switch roles, with Partner 2 reading, and Partner 1 listening and keeping track of errors.

**Teacher's Description of Reading Instruction**

I asked Ms. Bautista to describe her instructional practices and strategies in terms of reading instruction for her EL Learners with LD. She talked briefly about the scripted nature of the program, and the partner reading activity, then queried rhetorically, "So … what are the instructional strategies for ELL learners? The same thing as it is for any learner in this classroom who has been identified as learning disabled." She elaborated on her description of this instruction by stating that the CR program "is very structured." She continued, "[CR] is very scripted.… This is a strategy, direct instruction is a definite strategy." She continued, "[It's] very, very interactive, though." She described how the strategy works: "It's … Model, Lead, and Test. I say it, we say it, you say it. And then you write it." She reported that rather than having students memorize rules such as the "silent *e*," the program "just says, 'This is how you say the words' and in [an exercise in] the book, there are sounds that are underlined. And [students] are just supposed to point to the sounds, say the sound and read the word."

In terms of the content of instruction, Ms. Bautista stated that the program "is basically just decoding and … fluency." She explained, "Whenever we begin a lesson, the first part is the decoding—learning the sounds, read[ing] the sounds constantly—constant repetition. What is this sound? What is this word?" She explained, "It's to help

them see the small part, then see the big part, and then bring it back together again." She explained the focus on decoding, saying, "But we need to learn how to read better. … That way, when we … strengthen the decoding skills, the word attack skills, [then] the fluency rate increases. When the fluency rate increases, the interest in reading may enter." To improve reading fluency, the students engage in the timed reading of a passage with a partner.

After reading a brief passage, students are required to answer comprehension questions assessing literal comprehension. Ms. Bautista remarked, "They have a little bit of [comprehension instruction], but it's all very low level comprehension questions.… Just rote … kind of comprehension." She elaborated on this later, explaining, "[Comprehension has] been worked in at a very low level.… But, when does comprehension really kick in? When they know how to read more fluently." She stated that when students are "reading at 4th or 5th grade level, at 160 words, [when] there's a lot more flow. Then they can be able to comprehend better. That's when it's going to really kick in." Ms. Bautista continued, "Then all the other things fit in, like we said.… The whole world of reading [opens up to them.]." She went on as follows:

It's very frustrating to talk to them about "What is this about?" Or "What is the main idea?"… They're making predictions … when they're still trying to figure out what that word is.… It's so fragmented. You can't understand things in fragments. So the idea is … to work in a little bit of the comprehension, as we did, and as we're reading.… "Tell me … what it is." It's not any high level, you know, and what can you deduce from this, that, and the other thing.… It's not that type of thing. But it's getting them used to the idea that we're reading for a purpose. And the purpose is to understand something.… So, [instruction is] not as focused at this point [on comprehension]. [Comprehension] may be … not as important as the decoding. Ms. Bautista said students are directed to answer the

questions in complete sentences, which is, she acknowledged, "basically rewriting what the sentence said." She noted that this copying of sentences "isn't hard, but the idea is … [that] sentences … must have these elements."

Ms. Bautista described the accompanying workbook which has different exercises the students complete to practice the patterns they are learning. One recurring exercise calls for students to write words without their endings, which requires students to know, for example, that many words drop a silent *e* before adding an ending (e.g., *leaving*), or that words that have a double consonant preceding an ending (e.g., *dropped*) lose one of the consonants when the ending is deleted. Another exercise presents students with a selection of words with one or more letters deleted; students' task is to fill in the missing letter(s). Ms. Bautista noted that this exercise in particular, which requires students to know the correct spelling of the lesson's words rather than to simply recognize a word, is difficult for students due to the learning disability.

She talked a little more about the Corrective Reading program, stating that the content of the CR program is nothing new, and that in fact students have "seen this and … done it, [they've] been there before," but they "didn't learn it" in their previous language arts instruction. Ms. Bautista asserted that the CR program "accelerates a lot … of the skills.… They throw it all in there." She asserted, "The assumption is made that [the students] had those exposures [to the sound-symbol system] back then. They just didn't get it.… So it's a way of … coming at it a different way."

Ms. Bautista employed a battlefront analogy to describe the instruction, declaring, "We just barrel down the road [laugh]. Just mow them down like a panzer sys[tem]." She continued, "What is it that they do in the war—they've got these … flank[s] … and they just, phoom! And just go at it." She concluded, "And hope that it … and it *does* cover all of those little areas in between. [E]specially when we take [the students] back to where

they were, and then move them back up again." Ms. Bautista reiterated later, "This is just going back to basics." she added with a laugh, "Bringing the kids home".

Ms. Bautista indicated that she incorporates a spelling exercise into the weekly routine of instruction. She related, "The spelling test is not anything that's in … the program. That's just something that I've devised, to try to pick out the words that [students] are having problems with." She stated that the purpose of the spelling activity is "to try and to reinforce [spelling patterns], to have [students] study the words … so that [students] know … what their problems are." Ms. Bautista commented, "I felt that I needed an additional … wedge to … get [students] to study these words a little bit more." She reported that throughout the week she takes note of words with which the students have difficulty. She selects 10 of those words to target for study, and those 10 words are written on the board on the following Monday. Thus, the spelling words are drawn from those with which the students worked in the CR exercises of the previous week. Students then have the week to study and prepare for the spelling test administered on Friday.

Ms. Bautista talked about another element in her teaching. She indicated she tries to be energetic and dramatic in her lesson delivery so as to increase student interest and to make the lessons more enjoyable for the students. She commented:

> One of the things I like to do, is, help the students have fun learning. So I'd be up here … being really, whatever. Trying to put some personality into a very dry … script.… So I would … be very dramatic.… It doesn't take away from the lesson … but again, it has personality, and it makes it fun. So the kids are relaxed. And I guess that could be a strategy, too: Relax. Have fun with it.

Finally, Ms. Bautista indicated that, in an effort to motivate all of her students, she does "things like … feed them all kinds of stuff to … give them that little extra push." Such incentives include sausage wrap parties and other treats to improve student motivation. Ms. Bautista added, "Because none of it works without their own internal motivation." She noted that the high school students she taught on her island were

resistant only for a short time and then "knuckled down." However, she said, "This age group continues to resist. And I'm just thinking it's also part of their nature of being middle schoolers. And see, that's what I mean about allowances. I'm making excuses for them." In summary, Ms. Bautista stated she makes an effort to improve students' motivation through infusing her lessons with energy and drama, and reported providing students with periodic treats upon reaching completion goals she has established.

**Assessing Understanding and Progress**

In the second interview, Ms. Bautista indicated that though she "can never be satisfied" with the amount of progress students are making because "then we run into complacency," she is pleased with the improvement she has seen. She asserted, "My goal is for them to … gain two grade levels.… This program can bring them up … a grade and a half.… From 2.5 to 3.5 to 4.0. That's if we complete the program." She noted that there have been a lot of "obstacles" to achieving this goal, including students' being "tired of … the sameness," but "we just got to keep on plowing in there." In terms of judging progress, throughout the first interview Ms. Bautista talked about informal means of assessing her students' performance, such as listening to the quality of the students' reading, observing reading errors decrease in the partner reading fluency exercises, seeing students' confidence grow in reading and in speaking English, and monitoring the quality of students' written work in the accompanying workbook. This written work, she indicated, continues to have mistakes, which she attributed to "carelessness, not being focused." She noted, "My expectations, if it's simply copying, … 'Pay attention!'"

In discussing the growth she has observed in most of her students, Ms. Bautista commented the following:

> The biggest success would be when, at the end, towards the end of the school year when we start doing the post … post-program assessment. Post-test. To see the

> gains that they made. Now that's when I'll really…. 'Cause I know, I mean, I just know … it would be better, a lot better than it was when I first tested them.

In the final interview, Ms. Bautista reported that the teachers had recently attended a workshop to discuss the results of the post-testing conducted in accordance with the CR grant to assess students' progress under the program. She related that results indicated the students were reading on average 4 to 5 words per minute more on the post test than they had on the pre-test done in the fall. The teachers were informed that "statistically … the students were making small gains, and … they were acceptable gains." She revealed that she had not been aware of the kind of gains that were considered typical, and she stated, "To me, [their growth] was like, small gains." She observed, "The idea of my goals, to get them to attain two grade levels, [was] probably unrealistic."

## Considerations, Modifications, and Accommodations for EL Learners

### *Planning Considerations*

I asked Ms. Bautista what considerations she takes into account regarding her EL learners with LD when preparing lesson plans. She replied, "Well, the planning of lessons is a unique thing in the Corrective Reading program because there is no lesson to plan." The CR program is taught through a series of lessons consisting of highly structured exercises and activities, all laid out in the teacher's guide, including scripts for the teacher. She explained about this feature of the program, stating, "It's all written [in the teacher's guide]. It's also very structured. I walk in …." Though Ms. Bautista left this statement unfinished, she appeared to imply that because the lesson is scripted in the teacher's guide, she is ready to teach the lesson with minimal preparation time. She stated that the only change she has made to the CR program that she plans for is the addition of a spelling activity, as described above, which is done with all of the students in the class, native-English speakers and English-language learners alike. The spelling activity was

instituted as a means to encourage all of her students to make the effort to master words introduced and taught in the previous week's lessons.

***Modifications and Accommodations***

When asked to identify any modifications or accommodations in her instruction that she makes for EL learners, as noted earlier, Ms. Bautista asserted that the instructional strategies for EL learners are "the same thing as it is for any learner in this classroom who has been identified as learning disabled or special ed." She clarified her meaning during member checking, stating, "The direct instruction that's provided in the program is the same whether you're [an EL learner or not]. It doesn't differentiate." Ms. Bautista follows the program format, except for the spelling activity she had added, and hence, indicated that she does not alter lesson delivery or content for the EL learners.

However, through our conversations, it became apparent that Ms. Bautista did employ a few strategies not laid out in the teacher's manual to bolster the success of her EL learners or that are beneficial to many students, including the EL learners. For example, because of her knowledge and personal experience with learning a second language and the difficulties she has articulating her thoughts in Chamoru, Ms. Bautista indicated that when she calls on Jose, she "just sit[s] there and wait[s]" for the student to produce an answer. She related, "Somebody would throw—tossing out answers, whatever.… [But José] doesn't just repeat what everybody says.… He blocks everything out. He blocks everybody out. And he's … just looking at me, and I'm waiting. And I say, "Come on [José], what is it? … What's the answer? Tell me in your words." I pointed out that in allowing additional wait-time, she does in fact do something different for the EL learners in the class; Ms. Bautista appeared somewhat surprised, and responded with a laugh, "Oh, okay!" She spoke about this strategy as a means of holding the student accountable for producing the answer and not letting him avoid responding.

Another modification that Ms. Bautista mentioned doing, but did not identify as a modification, was her practice of "giv[ing] [students] a break on other things that they needed to do." This support is not specifically provided to EL learners, but rather to any student unable to keep up. She later elaborated about this strategy of providing increased support for students having a difficult time locating answers in the text to comprehension questions, stating, "If [José] and other students say … "I can't find it," [and] it's getting more … frustrating for them, then I help them by getting them to focus on a certain area." Ms. Bautista added, "But they still have to be responsible for it." She continued, "Unfortunately, somehow these students have gotten away with, 'Give it to me. Give me the answer.' 'Tell me where I need [to look], Show me the answer,' you know." She continued, "They don't like to hear … 'Here, let me show [you], this is the general area. Here's a more specific area. But *you* need to find it.'"

Thus, Ms. Bautista appeared willing to limit the amount of searching through text students must do to find answers to questions, but not to provide students with the exact location of the phrase or sentence required. She noted that she does not provide this degree of support to all students; those who appear capable of reading and locating answers on their own are expected to do so. She described how she did this, stating, "I go around and I allow, I tell them where exactly to find *fickle.* 'Look for it here.' Whereas if it's Monica, 'Monica, read what you need [to]. You can find it. You're more capable than this person.'" Ms. Bautista commented, "You know, that's the best I can do at this time. So that they can feel successful." She then added, "But it's still not making up for the two or three years that they have to catch up, they have to make up." Ms. Bautista concluded in a sing-song voice, "[We] just do the best that we can."

Another means of "giving students a break" that Ms. Bautista employed was in allowing other students to provide certain students with the answers during some of the

exercises. The CR program is structured so that the individual success of each student on selected oral reading exercises earns points for the whole class; in this way, there is pressure from the group on each student to make as few errors as possible. Ms. Bautista allowed classmates to call out answers for some students to repeat so that the group could still earn their points. In particular, she allowed students to provide this support for José and Ernesto, the latter a Spanish-speaking student who entered McKinney only a few months before the study, and so was relatively new to the CR program. Ms. Bautista related:

> When [Ernesto] has to read—he has to read a row of words or he has to read the section of … three sentences—the kids have their breaths held. And they go, they'll whisper—They'll call out the answers. And I let them. 'Cause if he says it, that's fine [laugh].… Because … they want their points.

Ms. Bautista indicated that she "allow[s] him a lot more leeway, in a case like that, because … he stepped into a different situation and he's still trying to learn the rules. And he hasn't really … gotten it." She commented that if Ernesto had been here all year, his experience would have been different. However, because he had enrolled late in the year, and hence, had missed many lessons, she noted, "I kind of not require as much perfection as I do from the students that I've had from the beginning of the year." She concluded, "All those little accommodations and allowances that … go along with the different factors … of the students' experiences here."

Another strategy Ms. Bautista mentioned was individual tutoring. She indicated that in order to provide opportunities for José to catch up on his work, she has told him to "come in after school, during [his] lunch, stay after, and [he] can do it. Do it that way." She tutors him from time to time during one of her conference periods, as well. She observed, "And when we go that slowly, then he go[es] 'Oh! Okay!'" She remarked, "Even the slow that I thought I was working with him [in the class] … needed to be even

slower." She reported that in these individual sessions with José she has reviewed the process of adding endings to base words, when to double the final consonant of a word, and, to support José's efforts to catch up on workbook assignments by answering comprehension questions about a passage, she would "point out the section where each [answer could be found] … and number them— [for example], 'You'll find the answer for number 1 here.'" She added, "And if he's still not quite sure how to phrase it … then we talk about it a little bit more."

Ms. Bautista noted that she had offered tutoring to another EL learner she taught. She reported that she had picked up Vigail from her home one Saturday and provided the student with individualized tutoring. Ms. Bautista had intended to do this on a weekly basis, but for a variety of reasons, they had not been able to meet for several Saturdays in a row. Ms. Bautista had therefore provided Vigail with a packet of readings and a stopwatch, and encouraged her to practice with her mother. She had also offered to Vigail's mother to tutor the student over the summer. Ms. Bautista reported that she has found that engaging Vigail in frequent conversations and waiting for her to formulate her responses beneficial to her conversational English. Ms. Bautista talked about how she helped support Vigail's learning in this way, stating, "I talk with her a lot, and I wait for her to give me the answers," and as a result, Vigail is now "much better, conversationally."

### LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

In reflecting on the Corrective Reading program in place at McKinney, Ms. Bautista stated, "This [CR] being the program we have in place to help … struggling readers, whether they're English language learners [or not] … You know, they're all thrown into the same pot, to work from whatever level they're at." She cleared her throat and affirmed, "I'm pretty satisfied with that." She elaborated, "I think this is where they

need to start. And," she added with a laugh, "[they need] a lot of English speaking. [They] need a lot of English practice, is what they need."

In a later interview, Ms. Bautista clarified that she was satisfied with the CR program for students identified for special education services at McKinney. She noted, "We [were] all part of that process to determine what program to bring in to help our struggling readers. And the struggling readers who are ELLs are also identified as Special Ed students. So, we understand that there's [some overlapping]." Thus, Ms. Bautista indicated that she was satisfied with the Corrective Reading program for all of her students with learning disabilities, including the EL learners.

In looking ahead to the coming year, Ms. Bautista had thought about changes she might implement with the CR program, based on student performance this year. For example, she talked about ways to improve students' fluency to a greater extent than had occurred this year. Ms. Bautista stated that students need to read more on their own, and they are not doing so. She declared, "So one of the things that I'm going to incorporate … next year is, I'm going to bring back Sustained Silent Reading, when I have the luxury of a whole year to try and catch up on the program." Ms. Bautista thus suggested that a Sustained Silent Reading program would provide the means for each student to engage in reading for specified blocks of time, which would in turn, she appeared to imply, lead to an increase in fluency scores.

Ms. Bautista planned to modify the rate at which she moved through the CR curriculum. She commented, "For next year, I think I'm going to have to go a little bit slower, especially with the [EL learners] … They need a lot of spelling … practice." Ms. Bautista talked about how she could enlist the assistance of parents in improving students' spelling. She stated, "I select the words one week in advance. What I should do

is, [pick them] two weeks in advance, and let [students] … prepare a packet of words to send home, so that they could practice with the parents."

Ms. Bautista talked further about tapping the parents to a greater extent in an effort to move students forward. She stated, "And that's the other thing, too.… We haven't really drawn the parents in enough about the program. We did have an open house, we invited the parents, but they didn't show." She attributed the low turn-out to the bitterly cold weather on the day of the open house in late February or early March. She later elaborated on the notion of involving parents to a greater extent next year. "I … realize that I did not utilize the home base … to the degree that … would have been helpful." Ms. Bautista and other teachers implementing the Corrective Reading Program at McKinney are making plans to bring parents in right from the beginning of the school year and talk with them about the reading program their children will be experiencing. She related how she planned to do this, stating, "At the beginning of … next year, I'm going to contact the parents and let them know this is what we're going to be doing. 'This is what your child is going to be coming home with. Here are stop watches.'" She indicated that the department would have "an open house with parents, they come in, we give them an orientation, we give them the … stop watches and they can go home and work and do the practice at home." Thus, the McKinney teachers will also enlist parents' help with a home-based activity to build reading fluency.

Ms. Bautista anticipated having two full semesters to teach the level next year, rather than just the one and a half semesters she had had the year of the study due to the October 1 start date. She talked about expanding on the activities next year to break up the routine, adding, "I'm thinking of … try[ing] to get a lot more games … to var[y] the activities because I'm going to have all year." She said of her instruction this year,

> I felt the need to complete the whole program within one year—and that's what I needed to do.… The spelling tests at the end of the week were the only … different thing that's been in the program. So, next year. And I have the summer to think about where I can add those activities. And … just how extensive they would be. So that we can still finish the … program, this … level.

Ms. Bautista added that these changes would be beneficial for all, "Because [the routine is] what was driving them nuts, and at some point, it was getting to me. It really was.… They're tired of … the sameness. But I'm tired, too."

In reflecting on how students had responded to the program and whether she saw ways to improve services specifically to EL learners with LD, Ms. Bautista observed,

> I think, ideally, it would be better to separate the English language learners from the non-English language learners because their needs—… If we lived, if we had [a] perfect situation, [if] we had enough teachers, and because they … would need, I think, I don't know exactly … the types of practices or activities that they would be needing in terms of the spelling patterns and … more practice reading. … But, for those [students] who are not English-language learners, they're … ahead already."

In reflecting on the difficulties of one of her EL Learners with LD in particular, whom she suspects may have dyslexia or dysgraphia, Ms. Bautista commented,

> When we see kids like [José]—Maybe we need to have a separate class with English language learners who are not in ESL anymore. And work with them more one on one.… Because I think [José] needs more sounding, he needs intensive drilling with the sounds.

Thus, Ms. Bautista indicated that EL learners could benefit from a program taught by a teacher with specific training in teaching EL learners in the areas in which she notes her EL Learners perform the worst, spelling and reading, if such a program were available. She acknowledged, "You know, when we have a spelling test, [native English-speakers are] scoring 80s, 90s, and 100s. And this is getting to be old stuff for them. Whereas the … English language learners are doing 30s, and you know, 40s. And I'm really feeling guilty!" She affirmed, "I know [EL learners are] going to need more practice in spelling those words, using the words more in context."

Ms. Bautista noted that vocabulary is another area where the EL learners could benefit from more instruction than the native English speakers appeared to need. She mused:

> The puzzle for me, with, like, José [is that] he's a real good word reader, word caller, but when it comes to understanding the concept, it's taking him a little bit more. And you know, we did discuss some of the terms … *work like a horse*, those types of things.… We need to discuss a little bit more.… And there are a lot of terms like that—idioms … that we need to … discuss. That would make [the students] understand better.

She commented, "But, because this is a decoding program … I don't think I've spent enough time with that comprehension part." Ms. Bautista continued, "But even with the decoding … with those who are having problems, you know … the Spanish speakers [are] having problems now with those vowel digraphs, you know, and blends, and they're going, "nnnnn". She added, "Now that we have *ea* and *ee*, you know, *beater* and *cheer*, *cheered*.… They can't figure it out." She remarked, "They can study these things … but they don't. They don't take responsibility for that, you know?"

The pacing of instruction in the CR program as it was designed was an additional area where Ms. Bautista saw a need for change, a modification she indicated would be beneficial for EL learners and native English-speakers alike. The CR teacher guide allots one 45-50 minute period for each lesson, a schedule Ms. Bautista has not been able to adhere to in the day-to-day realities of the classroom. Nonetheless, she said she tries to move instruction along as quickly as she can. In terms of altering the pacing of instruction, she commented, "The pacing of that, that's what I've realized [needs to change]." She reflected on the differing rates of progress evident among her students, as follows:

> And even with all special ed students with their different learning disabilities … Two students with learning disabilities, or English language learners, if they're at a higher level—let's say reading at a 2.3 or 3.0 level—… their pacing is going to

> be different from somebody … who's a non-reader or [at] pre-kinder, kindergarten level.… Again, it's an individual thing.

Thus, Ms. Bautista acknowledged that the students with stronger reading skills will progress at a different rate than those with weaker skills. She continued,

> The pacing [would change] … with all the different types of modifications they may need … if they're visual learners, of course, they're going to need more written … activities, or visual activities, repetitive activities, just like any LD student would have with whatever modifications are provided in their IEP.

Her comments indicate that Ms. Bautista believed a class specifically for EL learners with LD who recently exited from ESL would be beneficial because the pacing could be adjusted to allow for extra time devoted to discussing vocabulary and reinforcing vowel combinations, for example, that many of the EL learners in her experience have found difficult. However, such a class is not currently available due to limits imposed by the realities of a restricted pool of teachers on a campus.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In speaking about McKinney's choice to implement the CR program, Ms. Bautista noted,

> We can never … I can't account for all of them to be successful. I can't account for *any* of them to be successful, really. My hope is that what I'm doing will cause them to be successful to a degree. And I can see that they are successful in this reading program. I'm sure that there are other, many other reading programs that [are effective].… This is just one way.… This is one way … where I feel that we can get more students at a time … and much more economically feasible for us to use than some other program that requires one-on-one tutoring.
>
> I believe in it.… I feel for our students' purposes, this is where they need to be. … We can do other reading things in the language arts class.… and I'm hoping … that [the growth in skills] will extend … into that area.

# Ms. Ellen Schmidt

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PRIOR TEACHING EXPERIENCES

Ms. Schmidt had been teaching middle school students with disabilities for three years, all at Lyons Middle School, at the time of the study. Though she had previously taught young students with mental retardation, much of Ms. Schmidt's teaching experience prior to her placement the year of the study had been in an adjacent district which has many Latino students whose home language is Spanish. There Ms. Schmidt had taught 3- and 4-year old preschoolers with identified language delays, and in this capacity had worked with the students to increase their abilities to use language to express themselves and understand others' oral communication. The majority of her teaching load at Lyons was teaching resource reading and language arts to 6th and 7th graders. I observed Ms. Schmidt teach reading in both a 6th grade and a 7th grade reading class, as well as in a 6th grade language arts class.

## TEACHING READING AT LYONS MIDDLE SCHOOL

With three years' experience in teaching reading, Ms. Schmidt did not talk in detail about how she had taught reading in the two previous years during our interviews, unlike many of the other participants, nor did she mention any changes she may have made to her instruction or curriculum over that time. Ms. Schmidt did remark, however, that she had taught as 6th graders some of the same children she was teaching the year the study took place as 7th graders. Ms. Schmidt commented that Ms. Ramírez, the bilingual teacher aide, had been in the classroom with her the previous year, as well.

### The Classroom Context

Ms. Schmidt's classroom occupies one half of a portable building, one of several tucked in behind the school. The classroom furniture is arranged to create three teaching

areas: there is a bank of computers along the wall to the right as one enters, which forms the back of the room; there is a crescent-shaped table with chairs just to the left of the computer area, and then a larger area filled with student chairs and desks that occupies the space from the chalkboards along the front wall to the left back to the crescent-table grouping. Ms. Schmidt's desk is in the far corner opposite the single door. There are a few study carrels and a bookshelf in the back, just to the left as one enters, that form a pathway that guides students into the room.

Ms. Schmidt divided her students in the resource reading class into four groups early in the year to facilitate instruction. She noted that, though she had originally intended to have a fourth station, devoted to reading and writing, that plan had not worked out because she had quickly found that the students could not do the work without the immediate presence of an adult. To determine in which of the four groups to place each student, she had assessed students' reading abilities when they "took reading comprehension and reading decoding tests in the beginning of the year.… And of course, [by] listening to them, and some other activities." Ms. Schmidt described how she grouped students for instruction and the approximate reading levels of each group, as follows:

> They're grouped according to reading ability…. We have our red, yellow, blue, and green groups, going from lowest to the highest.…And some of them had moved from one group to another but [the groups are] not real … clear-cut, you know. In general, the Red group is the low 2nd grade, Yellow is 3rd, Blue is 4th, and … Green is 5th –or the highest in their class!

Then she added:

> I had to divide them … by 5 or less because of the computers. So I was kind of limited on that. And that's … how I wound up with … say, two Yellow groups at 6th period, because there really isn't any Red.…Yellow A and Yellow B, then, were the divisions.… And that's how they're grouped. They're not grouped by what language they speak at home or any other disabilities.

Ms. Schmidt commented, “I try to look at their behavior, though, somewhat … [and] I thought, ooh, that’s too many … in one spot!” She indicated that she did move a student to another group to facilitate behavior management in the classroom.

I asked if Ms. Schmidt changed a student’s group when she notices a change in the student’s skills. Ms. Schmidt replied, “Actually, I did [change students’ groups], a week or two ago. Now, there have not been very many [students] that I was able to do that [for].” She talked further about the factors that trigger changing a student from one group to another, stating as follows:

> First of all, the first change comes if they accomplish a level on Lexia, on the computer.… So if they’re totally done and I can see that all the levels are filled, then I have to change them to the next level. Which is good. So that’s… [strictly based on the] individual.

She continued:

> But as far as their groups go, like the ones that came in without much information, mid-year [half-laugh], I put them in the highest groups.…However [makes rueful face], one particular student … didn’t belong there, so we had to change him.…I had to rearrange [the groups]. But, there’s basically been just, oh, three or four [students] that way.

Ms. Schmidt added later, “There are probably some people I could change in the first period.… But it just hasn’t been done … just yet.… They do move … but very little.” She added, “Simply because of numbers, sometimes—it’s the computers.”

Ms. Schmidt thus indicated that the number of computers she has in the room for students to use constrains student movement from one group to another, stating, “And then, there’s the computer availability.… I did get a sixth computer, so that helps.… In that way, I’ve got six in this Red Group here.” With a limited number of computers and the resulting need to maintain a set number of students in each group, a student cannot join a higher—or lower—group unless a student from the receiving group also moved.

**The Classroom Community**

Ms. Schmidt has the daily assistance of a bilingual teacher aide, Ms. Ramírez, in her resource reading class. Ms. Ramírez leads one of the instructional stations, as described in the next section, and, as Ms. Schmidt noted with a laugh, "She helps with the behavior, too, if [the students are] not acting right." Though Ms. Ramírez usually speaks English with the students, she does from time to time clarify instruction for bilingual students in their native language. Ms. Schmidt recalled that last year, Ms. Ramírez "would speak to [Rafael] in Spanish … concerning … certain vocabulary, 'cause he'd look at her, you know, like [he didn't understand], and … so … she'd step in, probably realizing … what was going on with that." Ms. Ramírez was also observed on occasion to redirect the behaviors of EL learners and to exchange jokes with the students in Spanish, as well.

There were three girls and 15 boys present in the 6th grade resource reading class; 12 were Latino students, a few students were African American and the remaining students were white. Three 6th-grade English-language learners, Elena, Andres, and Esteban, have returned permission slips in conjunction with the study. In the 7th grade resource reading class, there were 3 girls and 9 boys, approximately half of whom were of Latino ethnicity while the remaining students were primarily African American. Two of the 7th grade Latino EL learners, Daniel and Rafael, have returned permission slips and are focus students for the study.

The reading-related goals in the most recent IEPs for three of the four 6th grade students indicated that by May, the students were expected to attain 3rd–grade level decoding, comprehension, and broad reading skills; the fourth 6th-grader was expected to achieve 4th-grade level skills. IEP reading-related goals for one 7th grader indicated an expectation to attain 2nd grade decoding skills by early March, while a very recent IEP for

the remaining 7th grade participant established decoding and comprehension goals in the 3rd-4th grade range to be attained by February of the following year. Thus, based on information recorded in the IEPs in place at the time of the study, the 6th grade and 7th grade EL learners Ms. Schmidt taught were performing from two to five grades below grade level in reading.

**Teacher's Perceptions of Students' Language**

I asked Ms. Schmidt to talk about the conversational and academic English language skills of her EL Learners. She talked about each EL learner in the classes I had been observing in turn. "The kids think Andres [is] funny. And he gets along pretty well with them.… He does not sound like he's learning English." In contrast to his verbal fluency, she continued, "When he starts reading and when he starts putting something down on paper, especially with the spelling—Spelling skills are something else!" she exclaimed. She elaborated, "A lot of times … there's a short *o* in the word, but Andres has [written] an *a*. Because in Spanish, that's /ah/.… And so, it shows up a lot, as far as spelling."

Ms. Schmidt continued reflecting on the conversational and academic language skills of her EL Learners. "Elena is another ELL student. Maybe it's her personality, I don't know, but she is not as outgoing and talkative as Andres." She added later, "She's one of the lowest readers, as well. In spelling, writing skills, [both] are a little better, which makes me think, maybe she's just kind of shy—this room is so full of boys." She continued, "Esteban is very quiet.… He won't participate unless you just about force him to. And I've found that in his other classes, it's the same thing." She elaborated, "This one teacher says …'I didn't know he could speak until, you know, a certain time of year!'… Says, 'I didn't know what was going on—he never answered.'" Ms. Schmidt noted, "And he had some trouble keeping up with his work, too." In regard to the level of

skill with academic language demonstrated by Esteban, Ms. Schmidt commented as follows:

> Writing, for Esteban, comes very slowly. I have to question him in everything. [Even] writing a paragraph, a small paragraph. [I have to] lead him through it. And I'll start a sentence and then I'll say, 'Because of blah, blah, blah,' and I'll say, 'And you finish it.' He *can* [finish the sentence], but … a lot of times it is [with] things I had suggested already, without a lot of original ideas.

Ms. Schmidt then talked about the interpersonal and academic language of her 7th graders, Daniel and Rafael. "Daniel is very talkative, outgoing. He uses a lot of humor. Academically, though, he's, again, in the lowest of groups. In fact, he's got like a 70 or 71." She attributed Daniel's barely-passing grade to his work habits, stating, "A lot of it comes from not studying, which is spelling or vocabulary, not reading … not listening—And here he is, in the front again!" Ms. Schmidt described Rafael, the final EL learner participant in the classes I was observing, as "more on the quiet side." She commented, "His skills have improved—I had him last year, as well as Daniel, but Rafael has improved more than Daniel has, as far as reading." She noted, "It's hard to separate personality and ability, sometimes. But Rafael is … still in the lowest … the lower of the groups."

### TEACHER'S KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT "GOOD" READING INSTRUCTION

When asked what she *knows* about teaching reading to EL learners with LD in reading, Ms. Schmidt replied, "Not very much!" She remarked, "I've never really had any training teaching … people with another language. …What I've picked up is just from, you know, what I've noticed about the kids in the last three years." Thus, Ms. Schmidt's statements confirmed my understanding of the information she had reported on the questionnaire completed at the beginning of the study.

In regard to her *understanding* of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD, Ms. Schmidt spoke in some detail about specific practices she had come to believe were important. She advised, "Go slowly and try to master whatever you're working on." She added, "Especially the decoding. Because I mean, if they can't decode it … they're just stuck." She continued, "Don't just skip around too much." Beyond decoding instruction, she related, "There's the comprehension part. And you know, that's a whole 'nother step." Ms. Schmidt acknowledged, "I've sometimes wished we had two reading classes, because one we could just work on decoding and spelling, you know. Decoding and encoding, that's what spelling is.… And then another class period just to understand what, what it is you've read." She explained, "Because there are so many words that, even though somebody like Amy [native English speaker who can decode] might be able to call [the words] out, she doesn't understand them." Ms. Schmidt noted that vocabulary development was important not just for understanding text, but also so that the students understand what others are saying to them. She continued, "And then there's fluency, that's a third part, instructing, I think they do need to practice. … Of course, that goes along with decoding, but still.… The better they can decode, of course, the more fluent they are."

In addition to the core skills of decoding, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary development and spelling, Ms. Schmidt noted that good reading instruction teaches students "the art of answering questions, too. Because they don't always cue in on the, like the plurals, or the … little subtlety, you know, the subtle hints." Thus, Ms. Schmidt suggested that good reading instruction included teaching students to carefully examine questions and identify and use clues in the wording of the questions to arrive at the correct answer.

In terms of reading materials, Ms. Schmidt indicated students benefit from reading something "longer than just a two and a half page story." With longer stories and materials, "the vocabulary repeats itself, which is good, helps them," she reported. Ms. Schmidt also suggested that to really be of use, resource materials such as dictionaries should be at students' level of understanding.

In regards to her knowledge and understanding of good reading instruction specifically for her EL learners with LD, Ms. Schmidt acknowledged, "Now as far as Spanish speakers, though, you know, I just kind of take it up as it … as it comes along in work." She explained, "Because … I don't feel comfortable or trained enough to just say, well, these are the plans for the Spanish speakers and these are my plans for the English speakers. But, as it comes up, you know, in especially the sounds of the alphabet." Ms. Schmidt reported, "I do know a little bit about their alphabet and in those ways then I can help the children distinguish the differences. The lack of sounds, the English sounds, in the Spanish alphabet." She noted that highlighting the differences between Spanish and English is beneficial for the EL learners, and she does this when she is able.

Ms. Schmidt appeared confident that the tactile, kinesthetic activities she incorporates into her instruction were effective for the EL learners as well as the native English speakers. She stated, "You know, I think that the same approach works for both, you know, to have their hands on things, first of all." She elaborated, "Hands on the computer, hands on the, you know, the whiteboard, hands on the pencil, the cards." She explained, "We make cards sometimes, too … vocabulary cards mostly. Spelling … flip-overs and stuff." Ms. Schmidt concluded, "So I think the techniques that I use probably are beneficial to them, too." Ms. Schmidt had also discovered by chance one day that pairing the EL learners is an effective technique, and noted that she will utilize students to help each other more often in the future.

In summary, Ms. Schmidt identified instruction in decoding, spelling, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, as well as instruction in how to utilize clues in questions as important elements of reading instruction. She indicated that the hands-on approach and slow, methodical pace that allows students to master the skill they are working on appear to be effective strategies with the EL learners as well as with the native English-speaking students. Finally, Ms. Schmidt indicated she believes pointing out differences in the pronunciation of English and Spanish letters is helpful for the Spanish-speaking students.

## CONTENT AND METHODS OF TEACHER'S READING INSTRUCTION

### Snapshot of Instruction in the Reading Class

The following is a composite of events that occurred in either the 6th or 7th grade reading class, drawn from observations on one or more days. Students enter the room, take their seats, and, talking amongst themselves, complete a warm-up that consists of writing down the day's agenda (e.g., "Stations and Practice for Test,"). Students raise their hands when done copying the warm-up, and Ms. Schmidt circulates and initials their agenda notebooks. Following the warm-up, Ms. Schmidt counts aloud to indicate it's time for quiet. After Ms. Ramírez, the teacher aide, has arrived, and at Ms. Schmidt's directive, students move to one of three stations.

About half of the class remains with Ms. Schmidt in the rows of desks in the front half of the classroom; this is the Comprehension group or "Station." These students are the combined members of either the Red and Yellow Groups (lower-skilled students) or the Blue and Green Groups (higher-skilled students), in accordance with Ms. Schmidt's grouping strategy. These students remain with Ms. Schmidt for the remainder of the period. She reviews the passage the group has been reading, and talks about the meaning

of the vocabulary words as they go along: curb, fur, purr, strip, tan, burlap, vet, and gills. Ms. Schmidt tells one of the EL learners that in English, the *g* of *gills* is pronounced */g/* (hard g sound). Students are then told to underline their vocabulary words and write *N* for noun or *V* for verb next to each because, Ms. Schmidt tells them, "that will affect which definition [in the dictionary] you write." Finally, using classroom dictionaries, students are to write the definition of each term on their vocabulary sheet. Ms. Schmidt circulates and helps some students.

Meanwhile, members of one of the two remaining color-coded groups (e.g., Green), have moved to the bank of five computers against the back wall to work in the Lexia program (Lexia Learning Systems, 1997); this is the Computer Station. Because it had been discovered that a few students had been listening to music CD's instead of working on the Lexia program, those moving to the Computer Station are directed to leave their backpacks at their desks.

Most of the students put on headphones to listen to the oral prompts that are part of the program and work on the activity that had been saved from their previous session. Students work on developing speed and accuracy on individual exercises that the computer program presents. One of the students has trouble logging on, and Ms. Schmidt walks over and helps her get started. Daniel, one of the participating EL learners, appears reluctant to do this activity, and does not put on the headphones for the first several minutes. He puts them on eventually and appears to attempt to complete the activity. Daniel has worked on his activity more than once; however, until he has achieved a level of accuracy established by the program, he cannot move out of the activity, and must repeat it. He cannot move on to the next exercise until his is successful on the present one. Daniel is having trouble identifying which spelling (e.g., *bit/bite*) matches the word

he is hearing in the headphones. I hear him exclaim to no one in particular, "This is hard!" as he starts the exercise yet again.

Members of the remaining group (e.g., Blue), meanwhile, have moved to the crescent-shaped table located in the middle area or the room, between the rows of desks that fill the front half of the room and the bank of computers against the back wall. This is the Study Station where Ms. Ramírez teaches spelling and provides students with guidance, practice, and encouragement with their spelling words. Ms. Schmidt also referred to this as the "Spelling Station." Students in the Study/Spelling and Computer Stations switch places after approximately 20 minutes of working on the assigned activities, where they work for the remaining 20 minutes at their new instructional station.

The words the group at the Study Station is working with on this day are: *far*, *are*, *curb*, *hurt*, *purr*, *shark*, *dwarf*, *arctic*, *church*, and *burlap*. Ms. Ramírez directs students to write each word eight times each. They pull out their chart (a blank sheet of paper folded into many squares) of *sound pictures* and, as they read the day's words, identify the sounds in the words, check to see if they already have the letter or letters that represent that sound on their chart, and write the sound picture for any new sounds in the next available squares (e.g., the sound pictures for *shirt* might consist of three squares, one each for /sh/, /ir/, and /t/).

At a later point in the week students will cut out their sound pictures, and, as Ms. Ramírez dictates their spelling words, they select the correct sound pictures to spell the words. On another day, when they are tested, Ms. Ramírez directs students to write each spelling word as she dictates, then the students are allowed to check their spellings against their spelling list. There is an oral quiz next. Finally, the students are given a worksheet with sentences containing blanks that students then fill in with the correct

vocabulary word. As they work, Ms. Ramírez jokes a bit with the students, speaking in Spanish with a few. Rafael, a study target student, speaks in Spanish with Ms. Ramírez and to himself, while Daniel, another study target student, speaks in English with her and to himself. The test at the end of the 6-week term will be over 20 words from previous weeks, plus an additional four new words.

The following day, students who had been at the Comprehension Station with Ms. Schmidt are split into their two constituent groups, with one group (e.g., Red Group) heading to work on the computers, while the other group (e.g., Yellow Group) heading for the Study/Spelling Station. As was done the previous day, students at the Computer Station and Study/Spelling stations work for approximately 20 minutes before they are directed to trade places. Ms. Schmidt's new Comprehension Station consists of the combined groups of students who worked at the Computer Station and the Study/Spelling Station the day before.

**Teacher's Description of Instruction in the Reading Class**

Ms. Schmidt talked about her instruction and how she teaches reading in the resource reading class. Reading of text occurs primarily in the Comprehension station. Whether consisting of students in the red and yellow groups or the green and blue, Ms. Schmidt reported:

> The comprehension group [does] pretty much the same activities, really, except that the materials are different in the groups.…Because all of the objectives … are … pretty similar, anyway, for everybody. Decoding, understanding, and spelling.

She elaborated, "[The higher-skilled and lower-skilled groups] will have a different story. Theirs is Sherburne, the cat … the –ur [pattern] and shark [-ar pattern]. So, just different focus of skills, but same idea."

Ms. Schmidt had relied largely on the Bonnie Kline Stories (controlled passages that reinforce phonics skills; Language Circle Enterprises**,** 1993) for text with her reading instruction until mid-spring. I asked Ms. Schmidt to talk about how she selected the Bonnie Kline stories for each group. She talked about her procedures as follows:

> I started out with the phonographics sound test.…Actually…I took part of the test, I didn't take the whole thing. But you could have tested consonants … [and] consonant combinations, too. But I took the vowels, because that seemed to be what most people were having trouble with. So I tested them on all the vowels, and it was always a vowel team, or … two or three letters.…[The students] didn't know what sound they made. So I took those, and kind of split up … according to groups and then I went digging through the Bonnie Kline stories to find the vowel teams … that I felt were missing.

Ms. Schmidt related, "In general, most kids were missing these, these, these. There are plenty more that … we didn't have time to get to—we won't have time to get to." She added, "But, at the same time, the Lexia is taking care of some of that [decoding instruction and practice]." In regard to the selection of stories, she concluded, "I mean, it's … not a real refined science and method … as far as very individual, but in general, this group needs, /oi/. This group needs hard and soft *g*."

Ms. Schmidt indicated that she had the students begin reading a chapter book mid-spring. One group had begun *Howl! A Book About Wolves* (Berger & Berger, 2002; reading level: Ages 4-8, as reported by Amazon.com), another had begun *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (Cleary & Darling, 1965/1990; reading level: Ages 9-12, according to Amazon.com), and the highest group had started to read *The Pinballs* (Byars, 1992; reading level: Ages 9-12, as reported by Amazon.com). She talked about why she had switched from the Bonnie Kline Stories to chapter books, explaining "[The students] need the vocabulary, and I felt like I wanted them to really accomplish a whole book. 'Cause we haven't really done that all year." She elaborated, "I wanted them to … really understand from one point to another…what they were reading." Ms. Schmidt

commented, “And I figured, well, four weeks is probably enough.… Some of it I plan to read so we can move along.” Later in the year, during our final interview, Ms. Schmidt indicated that she did not believe two of the groups would finish their books. The Red and Yellow groups, however, had finished *Howl* (Berger & Berger, 2002), and had then begun reading from a magazine intended for classroom use.

Ms. Schmidt noted that, in reading an entire book, “The vocabulary repeats itself, which is good, helps them.” She added, “We’re spending … a lot more time on vocabulary.” She indicated that vocabulary is addressed in the Comprehension group. She related that she provides students with a list of 12 words from the reading passage each week and asks students to indicate “what this [word] means, in [their] own words kind of thing.” She continued:

> And then, from there, I’ll make a list that we’ll look up in the dictionary. Because … I’ve found that they can’t necessarily express the definition, but they can use it in a [sentence] or give an example of it. A lot of times they’ll say—especially if it’s a verb, you know—“That’s when you blah blah blah.”

Ms. Schmidt provided an example, stating, “Like, say *annoy* is the word.… ‘That’s when somebody keeps bothering you, keeps messing with you!’” She noted, “That’s how they … express it,” adding, however, “Sometimes they’re real off base—‘Go to the dictionary!’”

I asked Ms. Schmidt if students could understand the definitions they found in the dictionary. She recounted some of the challenges she and her students experienced in working with dictionaries as follows:

> There’s a new … middle school dictionary … however, it’s still too high. So I went and ordered 12 children’s dictionaries. And they’re really effective. It uses very basic language and … there are … all the definitions, pretty much. Every now and then I’d come up with [a word] that’s not in there for some reason, and then of course, if you add an ending, it’s not there. So you have to put the root word in. But … [the definitions are] short enough so that they don’t have to try to

> remember, you know, two lines above it.… It has pictures, but they're not kiddie-looking pictures.

She reflected, "[Understanding the definitions] was a big problem, though, before I got the [children's dictionaries]. I ordered them … January or February because I knew that all they were doing was copying, in many cases." She added, "We *talk* about words a lot more than we did [before]." I asked Ms. Schmidt to elaborate on this notion of talking about words more. Ms. Schmidt stated, "Well … partly what I mean is … we've been getting into prefixes, a few suffixes, but mostly prefixes right now.… You know, word parts. How a prefix can change the meaning of something." She continued, "And also, just in general, as we read something … I think … they may not understand [a word], then I'll double-check, [and] most the time, you know, they don't." Ms. Schmidt noted, "They have an idea, but sometimes it's the wrong definition for the use of the word. And then sometimes it's totally wrong because it sounded like another word.… So they're not real correct on what they think things mean." She added with a laugh, "It's amazing what they come up with!"

Ms. Schmidt talked in greater detail about spelling development, as well. She reported that the two highest groups have one set of spelling words, and the two lowest groups have another set. She stated the following:

> The spelling … goes by the group. Red and Yellow is put together, and they have a different spelling list, they have a different reading story [than the Blue and Green groups] … [They] have a lower level of those kind of things. But the activities … that the assistant does [with the groups] are the same with each, pretty much.

Ms. Schmidt commented, "Generally … their spelling level is lower than their understanding of vocabulary. So you don't have to spend a whole lot of time on [discussing the meaning]. Just kind of go over it." Vocabulary and spelling words are drawn from the story the group is reading.

Ms. Schmidt indicated that up until mid-spring, vocabulary and spelling words for both the stronger-skilled group and the group with weaker skills were taken from the Bonnie Kline Stories collection. I asked her to talk about that. She explained, "Bonnie Kline … would have a focus, say—*ai* words. And then it would have six or eight words with *ai*, or *r*-controlled vowels, it had stuff like that." Now that she has all of the groups reading chapter books or novels rather than the Bonnie Kline materials, she can no longer turn to Bonnie Kline for vocabulary or spelling words. She noted, "Since I'm the person picking out vocabulary and spelling now [rueful laugh], there isn't as a big a focus, or as clear a focus … on the kinds of words that they're spelling." She added, "I'm trying to find some common denominator, which is a little more difficult!"

Ms. Schmidt talked about her specific procedures for accomplishing spelling instruction. She stated that the students take a pre-test on the week's spelling words, and then circle the words that, as a group, they need to work on. They are tested on those words at the end of the week. She indicated that Ms. Ramírez, the teacher aide, works with the students on spelling activities in the Study/Spelling station. She talked about some of the activities her aide does with the students to help them with their spelling, stating the following:

> Ms. Ramírez has the spelling group. And they write [the spelling words] down a certain number of times.… They write them down, and … she teaches them how to sound them out. So, they're sounding as they write—or they're supposed to be.

I felt that this practice of having students spell words aloud while writing them down was an enactment of Ms. Schmidt's stated belief that the students benefited from experiencing instruction in many different ways. I observed to Ms. Schmidt, "Getting it orally." She agreed, "Yes, that's right!" She added, with a motion of her hand, "[and with] fingers!" She continued, "And then they make sentences with it to make sure they understood what … it meant."

Ms. Schmidt talked about another activity Ms. Ramírez does with the students to help them learn the week's spelling words. She said, "Then sometimes [Ms. Ramírez]'ll take squares and they'll have to write letters or what we call sound pictures." She explained, "Those graphics—… *ai* is a *sound picture* for / /. And that's on one little square.… Then they have races or challenges about … spelling words after they cut out the little squares. Ms. Schmidt continued, "And then they have to write [the spelling words] down, as many as they can in a minute or two minutes or something like that. And then they'll do it again and see if they improve." She asserted, "[Ms. Ramírez]'s got some good … different little challenges for them." Ms. Schmidt then noted:

> Now with a higher group, she may be able to do a little more.… I'm not sure exactly all she does. 'Cause I know she does … some racing in there …which improves their memory, and … it's a little more fun than some of this stuff.

Finally, Ms. Schmidt talked about the instruction occurring at the bank of computers. She indicated that students practice decoding skills with the Lexia (Lexia Learning Systems, 1997) program installed in October by university researchers on Ms. Schmidt's classroom computers. Ms. Schmidt talked about how she placed students in the appropriate instructional level in Lexia. She stated, "Lexia is programmed pretty individually because we did … the Quick Reading Test [QRT] on most everybody. Now I can't say all, because, I've had probably four to five new ones since we did the QRTs with everybody." She talked about how she placed students in the Lexia program who had joined her class after everyone had been assessed with the QRT, explaining, "I started them at Level 2.… Because that's what was recommended by the people who make Lexia. And it's kind of middle-of-the-road, second, second-third grade. Which is the bulk of the kids' abilities." She added, "[Lexia's] the [instructional activity] that's very individual[ized]."

She later talked a bit about the demands the Lexia program places on students. She reported:

> The computer is very picky.… I don't know what the speed is … but they want [students] to be fast and automatic. And if [students] are not fast and automatic, they continue keeping them on the same stuff until they master it.

She commented, "Which is, I think is a good thing.… I'd rather have them … be really, really good at this skill, then just know a little bit about this and that." I asked how that works with the EL learners with LD. Ms. Schmidt paused and said,

> Well, they progress slower.… They go slower and … some of them get mad because, "I've already done this!" and I just have to go and explain.… And it's not even just ELL kids. It's just somebody who's just kind of piddling [around].… I'm saying to them, "Look. If you go faster, it'll move you out of that tower … and then you can move to another game or another level," whichever the case is, I said, "But you can't just sit there and take your time. You have to be fast. And you have to fill it in like that [snaps fingers]."

I mentioned that I remembered during one observation noticing Daniel, one of the EL learners, becoming frustrated with his progress on a particular activity in the Lexia program. Ms. Schmidt responded as follows:

> Yeah, and he still is! He's still on that silent *e*.… He's still aggravated at this one level. And I said, "I'm sorry.… You have to know the Mage *E* rule." Or the Silent *E* rule, whatever.… I said, "You just need to. There's too many words with it. I can't skip it."… He's going very slowly.

She added, "I guess that's where I should come in, if I have a spare moment—whenever that it is—and say … again, I've said it millions of times …'Magic final *e* makes the vowel sound long.'…It's not that I haven't done it, either! But, *something* is not getting [through]."

**Snapshot of Reading Instruction in Language Arts Class**

I observed a 6th grade language arts class that Ms. Schmidt taught at the end of the day to learn how she teaches reading in a language arts class environment. There are 21

students in the class, including approximately 15 Latino students, a few African American students, and a few white students. Many of the Latino students are in the resource reading class I observed, including three who have returned permission slips for the study. These students' reading-related goals, focusing on decoding, comprehension, and broad reading, indicate that these students are reading in the 3rd-4th grade range.

The lesson begins with Ms. Schmidt preparing students to listen to a book she has been reading aloud to them. She asks students to clear their desks, leaving only a blank piece of paper and a pencil. Ms. Schmidt asks students what they should be doing as she is reading. One student answers, "Making a picture." Ms. Schmidt agrees and adds that students may also draw what they do *not* hear mentioned in the story. She discusses with the class the notion of *seen text* and *unseen text* (*seen* text refers to events, emotions, or items explicitly identified or mentioned in the text; *unseen* text refers to those elements that are inferred from the passage and students' background knowledge). She illustrates the concept with a sentence about a girl who is stomping her feet because her dad wouldn't let her go to the movies; she tells the students that even though she didn't say the girl was mad, they might have inferred it because the girl was stomping her feet, which we don't do unless we're mad, and because we know that her dad wouldn't let her go to the movies, which we know might make a person angry. In this instance, Ms. Schmidt tells the class, students may have drawn an angry face on their paper. Ms. Schmidt reminds students to use clues from the text to picture what is happening in the story. She concludes the discussion of *seen* versus *unseen* with a reminder that *un-* means *not*.

Bringing the students back to the story they have been reading, Ms. Schmidt briefly reviews for students what has recently been happening in the story. She begins to read aloud from the book. Ms. Schmidt pauses after a few minutes to remind students that

they should be drawing something. Some students seem surprised and unsure of what to draw; Ms. Schmidt suggests that they draw the room in the story. She discusses vocabulary as she goes along, attempting to elicit the meaning of words (e.g., *sarcastic*, *unnecessary*, *accept*) from students. One of the words she asks students about—*world*—is familiar to students, but is used in a way that is perhaps not as well-understood. Ms. Schmidt rereads a portion of the story more slowly, emphasizing the following sentence: "I thought about the *world* in Woodstock (world #1), the *world* in New York (world # 2) and the *world* out there (world #3)." She asks students about the meaning of the word *world* in this sentence. The same student who had seemed closest to understanding the meaning of the word *sarcastic* offered, "[The character] is living two lives." Ms. Schmidt supports and elaborates on this notion, then continues to read aloud.

Upon finishing the passage, Ms. Schmidt asks for volunteers to share what they had drawn. A boy volunteered, and held up his sketch for the class to see. Ms. Schmidt noted the elements in his drawing and the boy identified the portion of the story he had chosen to illustrate, then Ms. Schmidt asked him if the items he had drawn were from something *seen* or *unseen*. After some discussion, it was evident that the boy had drawn a ceiling fan based upon his own experience of what some people have in their rooms, rather than from what was stated explicitly in the text. Four or five students shared their drawings. Ms. Schmidt asked each to identify the part of the story they had chosen to illustrate, and then to indicate whether the items were from seen or unseen text.

With about 15 minutes remaining in the period, Ms. Schmidt directs the class to the final activity of the day, resuming a short play they had been reading. She passes out educational magazines, tells students the page number, and asks for volunteers to read aloud. Students readily volunteer for this activity. Ms. Schmidt supplies the correct word when students stumble in their reading. After each student has read his or her lines, Ms.

Schmidt asks the student to explain what just happened. Finally, Ms. Schmidt asks a student to sum up what has happened in the portion of the play the class has read today; the students then put away the magazines.

**Assessing Understanding and Progress**

To accomplish monitoring how well her EL learners have understood a particular lesson, Ms. Schmidt indicated that her day-to-day monitoring of students' comprehension of a lesson is largely accomplished through oral questioning and then gauging the level of response. She reported that she "question[s] them as we go." She continued, "It's oral, pretty much. And if there are not a lot of hands up, then I think, Okay, they really don't know this. So I'm going to stop asking them, and just tell them!"

I asked Ms. Schmidt how she assessed the growth her EL learners are making in reading. Ms. Schmidt mentioned the testing administered by university researchers in conjunction with the Lexia intervention study the researchers were conducting, namely, the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (Woodcock, 1987) and the Reading Level Indicator (RLI) (AGS Publishing, 2000). Ms. Schmidt had administered the Quick Reading Test (QRT) at the beginning and end of the school year, as well as the Brigance (1999), and, as with the other assessments, first in September and then in April. Ms. Schmidt stated that she also takes grades on teacher-made tests on vocabulary and spelling. She indicated that in her grade book she "tr[ies] to put some kind of a blurb about the skill that was on the test." She explained, "Like I might say, 'these are r-controlled vowels on this test'." Ms. Schmidt continued, "And then if they come up again—and hopefully, the same things need to recur, but … especially vocabulary and comprehension at a certain grade level," she is able to compare the students' grades from one assessment to the next.

At the time of our final interview, the results for the State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA) had just come in. Ms. Schmidt explained that the SDAA results would indicate "what we expected and then what [the students] actually did." Ms. Schmidt quickly looked over the results for some of the EL learners, and remarked, "So, like Andres, last year's baseline was 1st grade, third level; [this year] we projected him to be at 2nd grade, first level. But he made it to 2nd grade, third level, so he exceeded expectations, in that case."

Ms. Schmidt then looked at the results for Elena. "Elena stayed the same, I don't know why. Perhaps because she accomplishes so little." As she looked more closely at the results sheet, she noted that last spring, Elena had attained "2nd grade, third level. We expected her [to attain this year] 2nd–third.… She [did attain] 2nd-third [level]. So, she met the expectations. And she may have gone past 2nd [grade level], but we don't know." In the SDAA scoring system, it should be noted, students can attain Level I, II, or III at the grade level at which they are tested (e.g., 2-I, 2-II, or 2-III): I denotes the student has demonstrated beginning knowledge and skills in the subject at the grade level tested, II signifies developing knowledge and skills, and a III indicates the student got most or all of the questions correct, indicating proficient knowledge and skills in the subject at the grade level tested (www.tea.state.tx.us/student assessment /teachers.html). Thus, Elena had achieved the highest designation she could possibly earn on the second grade level test (2-III) in the spring of 2001, and, tested at the 2nd grade level again in April of 2002, she achieved the same designation (2-III).

## Considerations, Modifications, and Accommodations for EL Learners

### *Planning Considerations*

In talking about her reading instruction for EL learners with disabilities, Ms. Schmidt spoke about the skill components she teaches, and then raised the topic of planning considerations, stating:

> Now as far as Spanish-speakers, though … I just kind of take it up as it … comes along, in work. Because … I don't feel comfortable or trained enough to just say, "Well, these are the plans for the Spanish-speakers, and these are my plans for the English-speakers."

Ms. Schmidt added, "But, as it comes up … in especially the sounds of the alphabet … then we'll address it." She continued, "So, it may be, not the best way, but it's, you know, incidental." Ms. Schmidt thus acknowledged that she did not plan specifically for the EL learners in her classes, but that if a need becomes apparent (e.g., when a student pronounces *i* as it is pronounced in Spanish instead of as in English), she addresses it as it arises if she is able. In an effort to check my impression, I asked Ms. Schmidt if she thinks ahead to some of her EL learners when planning lessons. She replied as follows:

> No, actually, I haven't.…When [a need] comes up in a situation, and I know [how to address it]—I do know that … the letter *i* … happens to be said /ee/ many times. And so I'll say, "Not in Spanish." But, I don't address it, I guess, as an objective, is what I'm saying.

Ms. Schmidt noted, "But that's something … I could certainly work toward." She concluded, "Having such a big population [of EL learners], probably would be a good idea. But," she added, "just to get through the lessons as they are right now is … overwhelming." Thus, Ms. Schmidt appeared to realize the EL learners might benefit from instruction that differed in some way from the instruction she planned for the native English-speaking students, but felt she neither knew what such instruction might include,

nor did she appear confident she could add this to her workload even if she did have that knowledge.

***Modifications and Accommodations***

The three modifications and accommodations Ms. Schmidt mentioned were all made in conjunction with her efforts to help one particular EL learner, Andres. Ms. Schmidt stated that Andres "sometimes gets confused." She continued, "He's one of my lowest readers … He's one of the ones with the lowest skills, period. And he gets frustrated sometimes. Kind of shuts down." Ms. Schmidt indicated she encourages him verbally, and finds she also has to "modify sometimes, especially for him.…'Instead of doing 12, I want you to do … every other one.' Things like that." She explained that she felt this modification was necessary because of Andres's "frustration with … the reading of the English language. It's related in some way. I mean, it's difficult." She added, "So, [I] try to give them a break. Makes it a little better, you know, lessen [the] expectations of quantity. Maybe not quality, but, how many can you get done, correct."

Ms. Schmidt mentioned an accommodation she has instituted with Andres that she believes allows him to have more success in understanding the material he is reading. She stated, "It seems like [Andres] has to read aloud to get any of it. And so he sits in the study carrel off to the back. 'Cause I realize he has to say it with his mouth." She added, "He's one of the few that actually must [read aloud]."

Ms. Schmidt shared that she had "discovered" another strategy that appeared to help Andres with an assignment on creating similes. She explained that as part of a lesson on improving students' descriptive language via the use of similes, she had given students simile stems, such as, "as dark as _____"; students were tasked with completing the simile stems and then using them in sentences. She stated that in introducing this lesson, she realized that Andres would "have a hard time reading this." She turned to a bilingual

student, Candido, who, although she "wouldn't say he's one of the top [readers]," is a better reader than Andres, and she directed Candido to "take Andres back there and read to him, and you all come up with answers.…As much on your own as you could, but I want you to read so he'll understand it, what he has to do.'" Ms. Schmidt reflected, "And it seemed to help. And I did notice that Candido was very … patient with him … and he was taking the time to read." She noted with pleasure that there were some differences in the boys' answers, and "yet they probably helped each other in different ways. And I was thinking that, [the pairing of students] was probably something I should have started way back."

I asked Ms. Schmidt if Candido had spoken Spanish with Andres. She replied, "I didn't notice it, if he did." She added, "But I was thinking … to myself, 'If you do get stuck … maybe you can say it in Spanish.' But I didn't direct him that way. I just said, 'Help him read it.'" She reflected, "[It would] be interesting … [to] maybe give [Andres] a buddy every 6 weeks, see how that goes." She added, "Elena is another … person who could use that kind of help.… But I haven't paired her with anyone just yet.… There's few girls to pair her with [in that class]." Thus, Ms. Schmidt appeared reluctant to pair her quiet female EL learner with a boy. She noted with a chuckle, "[The pairing up of students is] something I stumbled upon, actually, but it seemed to work, so!" She added, "I guess … it's kind of late! It seems to happen as, oh, well, you know, 'I'll try this,' or 'I'm desperate, can you help him?'—I don't have the time, I don't have the knowledge." She reflected, "But to use kids more [than I have] probably [would be good]."

Ms. Schmidt concluded, "I was thinking that that's something I … will definitely do next year, is to pair up." She added, "And I guess it could be done with lower and higher, anyway." Thinking of Andres's case, she noted, "But yet, that particular language barrier was going to need someone that knew the language of the student." Thus, Ms.

Schmidt appeared to recognize students' reading ability levels, their English/Spanish language proficiency levels, and their gender as three factors to consider in pairing students for the greatest effectiveness and the comfort level of her students.

In terms of language support for the EL learners, Ms. Schmidt indicated that Ms. Ramírez, the bilingual teacher aide, steps in and translates vocabulary for students who do not understand. Ms. Schmidt added, "And I occasionally get a Spanish dictionary and try to stumble through something myself."

### LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

In terms of her own instruction in the classroom, Ms. Schmidt reported, "I'm sure there are a couple things that … I need to be doing differently … to help them move a little faster. So, I'm not [completely satisfied]. I wish they had progressed more." She added, "But at least I've seen some gains. Just not as much as I would like."

In thinking ahead to changes she might make in her instruction for the subsequent year, Ms. Schmidt talked about possibly changing the schedule she had established for the reading of texts. In the arrangement in place at the time of the study, students spent one day in the Comprehension Station, where the bulk of the reading of text occurred, with the following day spent half at the Computer Station on the Lexia program, and half at the Study/Spelling Station. With this schedule, students cycled through the three instructional stations over two days, but the flow of the story being read in the Comprehension Station was disrupted. Ms. Schmidt related that in an effort to get students back into the story the group had been reading, she usually reread the last few paragraphs of the story or recapped what had been happening in the story, but she commented, "It would be better, probably, if [the students] read [the book] every day for a little bit." But, she acknowledged, "The way we have the grouping set, it doesn't work. So … I'll have to change that next year."

Another change Ms. Schmidt talked about instituting the following year was greater use of student pairing. She had been pleased with the results this spring when, out of need, she had assigned a bilingual student to assist an EL learner who she described as having very low reading and writing skills. Ms. Schmidt indicated that some of her students could benefit from the help of a classmate, and "that's something … I will definitely do next year."

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In reflecting on the programs that Lyons Middle School has in place to address the needs of EL learners with LD and whether Lyons could or should be doing anything else to move these students forward, Ms. Schmidt spoke about addressing their language needs. She commented, "I just think there needs to be a Spanish-speaker teaching Special Ed for these students that … need that extra step." She talked about her own experience, stating, "And even though I have the [bilingual] assistant that will help … when there's a big class and a big group, it's just difficult." She concluded, "So, no … I don't think we're doing all that we could." "But," she added, "If [the District is] not going to allow bilingual at the secondary level or [hire] people who speak the language, you know, as far as the teaching positions go—." Ms. Schmidt did not finish this statement, but seemed to imply that the policy of not providing bilingual programs and/or having bilingual personnel in the classroom beyond elementary school was problematic for the Spanish-speakers. Indeed, in a discussion about Ms. Schmidt's perception of the accuracy of the LD label for her EL learners, Ms. Schmidt had acknowledged, "I know that many of my students … that were in Spanish resource room … are really having a difficult time, the worst time, you know … compared to the others. And there is no Special Ed [program] in Spanish here—[at] middle school or high school—which is really unfortunate that … we're still at that point."

Ms. Schmidt mentioned a practice the school could implement that would benefit all of her students with LD, including the EL learners. In reflecting on her grouping practices and the constraints imposed by the number of computers available on her ability to move students from one group to another as the students' skills improved, Ms. Schmidt appeared to favor a more flexible schedule that would allow teachers to move students more freely from one group or class to another, depending on the students' changing skill levels. She mused:

> There've [been] times I wish it were different. So that I have maybe, let's say the two lowest groups and then another teacher would have the highest groups … and maybe a third one would have even the next highest. So [students] could move between us.

Acknowledging the logistics involved in offering three levels of reading during the same period of the school day, Ms. Schmidt added, "But the scheduling. You know, it would … have to be worked out. Coordinated like that."

In talking about the responsibility of moving EL Learners forward in their ability to handle academic material in English, Ms. Schmidt stated that the school "should share the responsibility with their parents." She noted that students are at school for 7 hours a day for the length of the academic year; however, "they're with their parents so much longer, whether they're physically with [the parents] or not … they're under [the parents'] influence, at least."

Ms. Schmidt also talked about the importance of learning English. She stated, "I think that if they want to be in a country that speaks English, and they want to work here, and [progress] here, then they should be expected to learn the language that will help them progress." She added with a rueful chuckle, "I'm sure this sounds prejudiced, but, it's a hardened reality that if you're going to get a job, you need to…speak the language that the customers speak."

Ms. Schmidt then spoke about her perception of parents' responsibilities vis-à-vis their children regarding issues beyond learning the language of one's adoptive country when she continued, "And … the same thing goes … for all kind of things. Morals, especially. Heaven knows, that's another story [laugh]." She continued, "It's a lot having to do with the parents' expectations.… Do they check? Did they ask them what they did? Do they communicate with teachers? Do they look through their work?" She concluded, "So, I think it should be shared. It certainly is a big responsibility."

I asked Ms. Schmidt what she felt her own responsibilities were toward the EL Learners with LD that she teaches, and what she realistically felt that she could and should be doing for them. She replied, "My job is to give them opportunities, of course, to … learn as much English as possible." She added, "And yet … I need to respect, of course … that … [Spanish] is their first language." "However," she continued, "Like I said before, [have them] progress in English, 'cause they need to learn English. So my job is to teach them English as much as I can. And the skills that go with the reading, the writing, those things." Reflecting her awareness of the concerns expressed by Spanish-speaking parents about a recent District proposal to create *blueprint* schools, which could affect the availability of bilingual instruction, Ms. Schmidt added, "But it is a tricky thing I know, [a] very touchy subject down at the school office these days."

# CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

The teacher portraits presented in Chapter IV detailed each participant's personal and professional background and experiences, as they related to the teacher's work with EL learners with learning disabilities. Teachers' beliefs about "good" reading instruction were presented in addition to a description (by the researcher and by the individual teachers) of each participant's reading instruction and his or her thoughts about successes and challenges encountered in their work. The teacher portraits in conjunction with interview and observation data shed light on the four questions that guided this inquiry. Common elements pertaining to each research question will be addressed in turn.

## Teachers' Perceptions of Characteristics and Factors that Impact Reading

The first question was conceived as a means to unpack teachers' perceptions of the factors that they believed influenced or contributed to the reading achievement of their EL learners with learning disabilities. While each middle school special education teacher who participated in this investigation had a unique understanding of the reading difficulties exhibited by his or her EL learners in terms of the range of influential factors and degree of emphasis allotted to each, some common elements emerged across participants. These fell into four broad areas: (a) the learning disability; (b) students' status as second language learners; (c) student- or family-related values and practices; and, (d) the nature of the reading instruction these students had received in elementary school. It should be noted that teachers indicated that most factors, with the exception of those related to the second-language status of students, could be equally applied to native English-speaking students with learning disabilities.

## STUDENTS' LEARNING DISABILITY

> *A lot of the kids seem to ceiling out at third grade and they just don't make any progress beyond that.*
> Ms. Janiak

Teachers described their students' reading achievement in terms that reflected the means by which the students had qualified for services as students with learning disabilities. Specifically, teachers spoke of students' uneven knowledge and skills and also identified several key components of reading where their performance was significantly below the levels necessary for competent, efficient reading.

### Gaps in Skill Areas

Teachers spoke about gaps or inconsistencies in their students' skills, rather than a more uniform lack of knowledge. In speaking about the progress she has observed in her EL learners with the Corrective Reading program, Ms. Reinhart asserted, "I think this approach has helped a lot of them just pick up the gaps—to find their weaknesses and to … reinforce those areas." She indicated the program had achieved this through taking the students back to "the beginning." Similarly, Ms. Bautista spoke about her students having "huge gaps" in "skills that have not [been learned], that [they have] missed for some reason." She continued, "Whatever [the reasons] are, we're not going to dwell on it, we're going to move on." She noted that neglecting to fill in the gaps can have dire consequences, affirming,

> We need to solidify the base, and build from there. So long as that base has a lot of gaps, they just keep falling in, and that's what we have. Sketchy knowledge along the way. And at some point it's going to get so sketchy and the gaps are going to be so wide, they just drop out.

She indicated that with the CR program, students had been "pretty much placed together" and "homogeneously grouped" according to the "gaps" that the students had demonstrated.

In contrast to Ms. Bautista's matter-of-fact acknowledgement of students' gaps in knowledge and skills, Mr. LeBlanc, the participant newest to teaching, expressed a great deal of frustration with these gaps. He reported, for example, that his students could write a four-paragraph essay, but could not identify where an individual sentence began and ended, apparent contradictions in abilities that seemed to leave this relatively new teacher dumbfounded. He asked me if I had been present on the day "when [the students] didn't know how to write sentences, but they knew how to write whole paragraphs?" I had not witnessed this lesson, so Mr. LeBlanc then gave an account of the difficulty his students had experienced in identifying where a sentence began and ended, a seemingly low-level skill, despite the fact that they had been able to write essays. He recalled his reaction to this discovery, stating, "It was *weird*, I mean—Talk about something *new*. My *goodn*[ess], I just *couldn't*, couldn't get *over* it. I couldn't *understand–how* in the world– 'Where does a sentence start, Mister?' They'd ask me." His straight-forward response to the students, he reported, was, "It starts right after the period before it."

**Inadequate Mastery of English Phonetic System**

Teachers identified poor knowledge of the phonetic system of English and accompanying difficulties in decoding and encoding. Many linked these skills implicitly or explicitly to the EL learners' status as native Spanish speakers, a theme which will be presented in a later section.

Poorly developed decoding skills were noted by all teachers. Ms. Janiak indicated that at the beginning of the year, at least one of her EL learners "didn't have a whole lot of sound-symbol association going because of the *y*'s, the *l*'s, and so I, at the beginning

of the year … I really want them to get a grasp on the linguistics.…The sound-symbol association." Ms. Janiak further suggested that a teacher of EL learners with LD should "start with the very basics," and then "move much more quickly. … And if certain kids need to still continue reinforcing sound-symbol, then … get them onto a remediation program while the other kids are doing another warm-up." Mr. LeBlanc indicated that some of his students couldn't tell him which letters make certain sounds. Ms. Bautista spoke about the importance of having strong basic decoding skills in place, stating, "The further [the students] got along without the basic structure having been in place, the more they lagged behind.… Exponentially, [the gap] gets larger. It doesn't decrease, it increases. And that's where we are at this school. They don't have strong basics." She spoke about the challenge of teaching comprehension when students possess weak decoding skills, stating, "It's very frustrating to talk to them about 'What is this about?' or 'What is the main idea?' …You know—they're making predications … when they're still trying to figure out what that word is. Because [the comprehension then is] so fragmented. You can't understand things in fragments." Ms. Bautista noted that improving students' decoding skills can have positive consequences, asserting, "When we … strengthen the decoding skills, the word attack skills, [then] the fluency rate increases. When the fluency rate increases, the interest in reading may enter."

Many teachers talked about students' difficulties in accurately decoding vowels, in particular. Ms. Schmidt explained that in doing her initial assessments to guide her instruction, she had focused on the vowels, "because that seemed to be what most people were having trouble with. So I tested them on all the vowels, and it was always a vowel team, or you know, of two or three letters, and …they didn't know what sound they made." Ms. Reinhart stated, "They were kind of all unsure of the vowels." Ms. Bautista acknowledged in our second interview that she was "learning … especially with the

Spanish-language … students, they have a hard time with our … vowels.… It's really, really difficult for them now that we're getting into the digraphs … and the vowel digraphs … and the blends. It's very hard for them to distinguish. Especially, they're learning disabled *and* English-language learners."

Most teachers spoke about the poor spelling and writing abilities demonstrated by their students; similar to their perceptions of students' decoding difficulties, many teachers either explicitly or implicitly linked the poor spelling and written expression to students' status as second language learners. Ms. Janiak spoke in general terms, stating that writing "comes up a slower pace" than reading. Ms. Schmidt indicated that, though Andres was able to express himself verbally in English, his limitations in English became more evident when the task involved reading, writing, and spelling. Specifically, Ms. Schmidt recognized that Andres was able to use his verbal English skills to engage in humorous exchanges with his peers, but reported, "When he starts reading, and when he starts putting something down on paper—especially with the spelling. Spelling skills are something else!" Ms. Schmidt indicated, for example, that Andres may write the letter *a* instead of *o* in English words containing a short *o* sound, because that is how the sound is represented in Spanish. She stated, "I've sometimes wished we had two reading classes, because [in] one [class] we could just work on decoding and spelling, you know, decoding and encoding–that's what spelling is."

Ms. Bautista perceived a link between a lack of emphasis in students' earlier education on decoding skills and her middle school students' spelling, stating, "And spelling ties in a lot to that.…If you don't know what it looks like, to spell it, then you're just going to be throwing anything at it." Some letters of the alphabet, though common to Spanish and English, represent different sounds; Ms. Janiak spoke specifically about English-language learners' need to learn this new system for spelling and reading. "A lot

of the kids that I've taught that have been ESL still have [trouble with] the … *l* and [other letters that sound different in Spanish]… when [they're] spelling or reading or in the sounding out. So they still have a hard time acquiring … the *new* sound-symbol pattern that they're unfamiliar with. That affects a lot," she asserted.

**Inadequate Levels of Comprehension**

Teachers identified students' poor comprehension of written materials as problematic. Comprehension of text appeared to suffer due to students' basic vocabularies as well as low-level comprehension. Several teachers spoke about students' lack of higher order comprehension skills. Ms. Janiak talked about the need to teach students how to identify what is important in a passage, a process she likened to "sifting through, finding gold—the gold nuggets." Mr. LeBlanc reported problems with comprehension, as well, stating, "If [the students] can actually find [the information] in the encyclopedia, all they can do is just copy the words. They don't know what they're writing or reading." He reported that the year just prior to the study, his students had experienced greater difficulty with comprehension than with decoding in working on assignments for his project-based curriculum. Ms. Schmidt posited that the poor comprehension her students exhibited may be in part due to the students failing to visualize as they are reading. She commented, "A lot of the learning disabled kids … don't visualize things. And so they're not putting what they read in a picture form in their mind. Now they might see it perfectly well, in a drawn picture, but if they're reading it, they're not processing it as a picture." Alluding to the problems the English-language learners would encounter if they do not know enough English vocabulary to enable them to visualize, she added, "And then, you know, we don't have Spanish and English pictures!"

All participants talked about the need to build students' vocabularies. Ms. Reinhart mentioned vocabulary as the area that she attends to before teaching a Corrective Reading lesson, realizing that words may be used in a manner that is unfamiliar to her students. She noted that EL learners may have difficulty understanding the verbal exchanges of their peers due to the students' use of slang, but they also may have trouble understanding content in science and social studies "because the vocabulary is more difficult, the reading is more difficult, and they may not have the field of knowledge or the background to understand what is being said." Mr. LeBlanc noted that his EL learners have a smaller vocabulary, and described the effects of this. He related, "And I guess, that's what I've learned.… That if English isn't your primary language, it knocks you down a few levels in … simple comprehension of what's expected of you." In seeking clarification, I asked, "And, [they're] not understanding because of *vocabulary*? … In English?" "Right," he confirmed.

Ms. Schmidt described the language of her students, including the EL learners, as "very basic," and expressed the desire for a class period devoted to "understand[ing] …what it is you've read, because there's so many words that, even though somebody like Beth [native English-speaker] might be able to call [the words] out, she doesn't understand them." She clarified that she was speaking about vocabulary words that students might be able to decode, but did not know the meaning of. In regard specifically to EL learners, Ms. Schmidt mused, "Do they *think* in Spanish? You know, I don't know. But if they do, then vocabulary is … certainly going to be affected." She then shared that, the previous year, Ms. Ramírez would "speak to Rafael in Spanish … concerning … certain vocabulary," and thus provide language support to one of her EL learners.

Ms. Bautista spoke about one EL learner in particular for whom, she stated, "Something is not clicking." She noted, "They can *read* the words.… And that's … the

puzzle for me, with like a José. He's a real good word reader, word caller. But when it comes to understanding the *concept*, it's taking him a little bit more." She explained that she and the students had discussed some of the expressions and idioms, such as, "Work like a horse." She asserted, "There are a lot of … terms like that, idioms, that we need to discuss, [which] would make them understand better." Ms. Bautista added, "But because this is a decoding program … I don't think I've spent enough time with that comprehension part." Finally, Ms. Janiak, too, identified students' vocabularies as an area needing attention. She explained, "We try to build on [language].…We work with [words] … word-based meanings.… That was one of the lowest [areas] on their [state-wide exams], in the regular ed and [special ed]." I verified my understanding, "Is that vocabulary?" "Yeah, vocabulary. Vocabulary development. So, uh, it's good to keep introducing new words. Try to parlay it with something that they know."

### NATURE OF PREVIOUS READING INSTRUCTION INADEQUATE

> *Unfortunately, most of our kids that come to us are [reading at the] second and third grade [level]. Boom. It's like, where did we lose them? Did they give up? … Did they not have the right [instruction]?*
>
> Ms. Janiak

The second theme that emerged from the data was the teachers' perception that the reading instruction their students had received in elementary school was a factor in the reading difficulties they observed among the middle-school EL learners with LD. Many participants speculated that the instruction their students had received in their early schooling did not teach reading skills using a direct approach, which they suggested would have been more beneficial for their students with learning disabilities. Some teachers posited that students had not been taught to read using phonics, which, they

indicated, might have been due to the reliance of students' general education teachers on the whole language approach to teaching reading.

Ms. Reinhart, for example, in reflecting on the effectiveness of the CR program in filling in her students' weak areas in decoding, speculated, "I don't know if it, they hadn't been taught, or it just maybe it needed to be reinforced." She reflected on why students appeared to be making progress with the CR program, stating, "And maybe they'd come … a far enough way to just go back now and pick up parts of it. I think probably it's a combination." Ms. Reinhart mused, "And you know, they could have gone through their earlier part of school where they were using whole language, and they just missed this phonics."

Similarly, Ms. Janiak suspected that her students, too, had been taught to read via the whole language approach, which she appeared to view as inadequate for students with learning disabilities. She related, "You know … I used to think it was part of the whole language program, because that's how I was taught 10 years ago in college." She commented, "You know, whole language, immersion, you know, and that worked for some kids. But what are we going to do for the other 20%?"I asked Ms. Janiak in member checking to elaborate on this topic of students' previous instruction. "Ten years ago …. It's probably 15 years ago, they were saying, um, all the kids–They were *really* into whole language [movement.] 'Immersion,' 'They'll acquire it,' and that kind of thing." She asserted, "And it did not work for the truly LD child. If they were an LD, probably ESL-type of kiddo, there was no *way* they were going to acquire the language." Ms. Janiak declared:

> I find that, very typically with the learning-different child, is that you have got to directly address those skills to be taught. Because they're not going to acquire it. Otherwise, you wouldn't have that percentage that just didn't get it in kindergarten, first, and second grade.

She spoke about the results of the instruction students had received in elementary school, asserting, "And then you get the heavy-duty … special education referrals. 'Let's assess them, let's test them.'" She concluded, "It just didn't work for a lot of kids."

Ms. Janiak reported, "I was always taught that you had to directly teach the skill." She ascribed this to her special education major. She continued, "The regular teachers were really part of this holistic, whole language, 'Oh, just free write!' [makes a face]. 'We'll just correct them, and by osmosis, they'll learn it.' And they *didn't*. You know, they didn't change from a caterpillar into a butterfly." Ms. Janiak stated that whole language instruction had not been sufficient for students with disabilities "because they just kept repeating the same mistakes, [and] getting frustrated. They didn't have any *tools* in order to begin learning to read. They didn't have a *process* to apply to the word. They just didn't get it." She concluded, "And so we lost a lot of kids at that point in time.… [Whole Language] is what a lot of the regular teachers at that point in time had.… That was their process of instruction. And it just didn't work for the kids."

Ms. Bautista, likewise, suspected that "for the most part [the students] come from the whole language era," and had been taught to read with whole language methods "with the contextual reading and all of that. So the emphasis on learning sounds…. how to attack words, was not taught." Ms. Bautista continued, "Their thinking was that everyone will learn how to read the whole wor[d]. You read first, and then understand, and everything is going to fall into place." Like Ms. Janiak and Ms. Reinhart, Ms. Bautista spoke about the inadequacy of the whole language approach for students with learning disabilities, asserting, "But, there are just those that don't fall into that category, and this is the result of that work."

I asked Ms. Bautista to elaborate on her perspective about students' previous reading instruction. She clarified her position about the whole language approach to

teaching reading, stating, "It's not so much that it's inappropriate, but it's probably not enough time." She explained her thinking as follows:

> Students learn all at different rates. And if John needs three hours to learn this concept, and … everybody in the class was given only two hours, they move on.… So John then moves on to the next concept.… But he hasn't learned this, because he wasn't given the three hours, so, you continue to add that on and they fall further and further behind.

Ms. Bautista commented, "This student may have learned how to read with the whole language approach if that student was given more time." She noted, "But school years and … curricula [do] not allow that. …We all move at the same pace, at the same rate to the next year." She remarked, "[The students are] stuck on trying to figure that out, but everything else they've been taught along the way became inappropriate. It's inappropriate to teach somebody 4th grade level stuff when they're still operating at 2nd grade level." Ms. Bautista concluded, "[The inappropriateness is that] the time that is needed to learn is not given, was not allowed."

### STUDENTS' STATUS AS SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

> *We have English-speaking students who are learning disabled. Like, you modify that, and work through there. But how do you modify for Spanish-speaking students who are learning disabled in Span[ish.]… Add [the second language factor], and that's what … pulls them down even further behind than those who are English-speakers who are learning disabled. Because they have a dual disability. So [sigh], it's an uphill struggle.*
>
> Ms. Bautista

Most teachers indicated a belief that the fact that EL learners were not native speakers of English affected their learning in a host of ways. Ms. Reinhart, for example, stated broadly that the second language status of the EL learners "probably will be a factor" in the reading disabilities she sees, "just in the fact that they, you know, have learned to read maybe, perhaps in one area, and then they're having to relearn [in]

another language, and I'm sure that they are confused." Several participants identified specific areas in which the second language status of students impacted their reading achievement, such as in word attack skills, vocabulary, comprehension, and other language arts skills such as spelling and writing, or identified ways in which students' status as non-native speakers of English impacted their reading, and these are presented next.

**Interference from Native Language Hampers Skill Development**

Teachers spoke about evidence of two specific ways in which the native language interfered with and/or complicated students' progress in improving their reading skills.

First, in regard to the effects of students' home language on decoding and word attack skills, teachers spoke about difficulties arising from differences in the sound-symbol systems of the two languages. Ms. Reinhart stated the following:

> One of the things we've noticed with one of the kids [is] that the … *e*'s and *i*'s, they still have a difficult time. And even after all this time that we've gone through the sounds and the pronunciations, [Angelica's] still hesitant. And she really has to think, you know, the *e*'s and the *i*'s.

Similarly, Ms. Janiak noted, "The whole sound-symbol association is structured differently. So … they have a harder time transferring that knowledge. The … *l* and the double *l* and some of those." Thus, these teachers identified a few letters that represent different sounds in Spanish and English and thereby made the EL learners' decoding task more difficult because, as Ms. Janiak pointed out, they cannot rely completely on what they have learned about decoding in their native tongue.

Ms. Schmidt talked in detail about the differences in the orthographies of the two languages, and identified the difference in the degree of transparency of the two languages and the more complex English vowel system as sources of difficulty.

> I would imagine it's probably even more difficult for them because … first they're changing … from a Spanish alphabet to an English alphabet. Even though they may be very good at the Spanish sounds. And … there's limited sounds and sound combinations [in Spanish]. Like, they don't put their vowels together, so they've got … just the 5 or so sounds, and there's just, I don't know how many sounds there are in the English alphabet, when you combine what you *do* combine.

Ms. Bautista expressed similar thoughts on the differences in the sound-symbol systems, affirming, "They know their alphabet. Because there's one sound, one symbol. And then they have to deal with the English, and you know, one sound, five symbols, or four sounds to [one symbol].… So it's very complicated." Ms. Bautista reported the following:

> I'm constantly thinking of why is it that … in my experience … other … students who speak languages other than English have an easier time, even if they're special ed students, learning English and reading English than … the Hispanic. And I realized that [the others] don't have a phonetic system like English. So … when we begin with the phonetic awareness and every[thing] … they don't have prior knowledge that confuses them. You know, when you think about it, Japanese, Indians, Filipinos--they have a totally different kind of … written language.

Thus, Ms. Bautista speculated that English-language learners whose written native language looks very different from the written form of English do not enter the classroom with expectations about sound-symbol relationships, which she perceived as a source of confusion for students. She observed, "To be literate in their language is very helpful in that transition to … another language. Makes it easier for them. But, because of their learning disabilities, it makes it harder for our students." She remarked further, "This of course is only my opinion … that, because [Hispanics] do have a very precise phonetic system, as precise as it can get, then, that confuses them because they're so used to it in their [language]."

In addition to perceiving interference due to differences in the orthographic systems of Spanish and English, teachers also attributed interference to the syntaxes of

the two languages. This source of interference was especially evident in the writing of EL learners. Ms. Schmidt, who had taken a summer course in Spanish, spoke about differences in the two languages in the location of adjectives in relation to the nouns they modify. She stated that in the EL learners' written work, she sometimes sees "things that are turned around," especially among her students who "are really surrounded by [Spanish] at home." Similarly, Ms. Janiak commented, "The whole language is structured differently, including the writing portion, from Spanish to English." She noted that writing is more complex for the second language learner with LD "because they're having to learn two different concepts—from their native language into the new language. And I'm sure that that's got to be harder." Ms. Janiak added, "I mean, I can read Spanish, but I cannot write in Spanish, because it hasn't become automatic for me, that sound-symbol association. [It's] definitely harder."

**Demands of Translating**

The second specific area in which participants perceived students' status as second language learners impacting their reading achievement was in some students' need to translate. Some teachers' comments suggested they recognized the processing demands that translating to and from Spanish would impose. Ms. Reinhart, for example, talked about students' need to translate "from one language to the next." She stated, "Even if, [in] their mind, if they're reading something, I think sometimes that they maybe will be thinking in Spanish, you know, and then they're actually having to read [in English], and so I think sometimes, work … doubly hard … to comprehend."

Ms. Schmidt spoke about the challenge before her EL learners to translate "whatever they're hearing … from English to a Spanish word they know, and then back to an English concept," especially when students may not be "good at the English word to the concept for it, anyway." She remarked, "It's an additional hurdle." Ms. Schmidt

elaborated, "I'm thinking it's …. *two* steps for them. I would imagine … it's very difficult. To make two steps instead of just, you know, the *one* that English speakers … need to make." She acknowledged, "Then it just takes extra time. I think that's what's happening." Thus, Ms. Schmidt appeared to recognize that translating from one language to another required more than simply translating words, but also concepts, and she acknowledged that this process would take additional time.

I asked Ms. Bautista, the only participant to grow up in a bilingual community, to elaborate about the role of the native language and to talk about how she saw the native language influencing the reading difficulties she observed in her students. "The native language always wants to take over.… That's what they … think in." She acknowledged the following:

> It's very difficult for them to do that two or three step process. Because it's all mental, and you know … the native language wants to take over. All the time. It's much easier. The comprehension is greater. So … there's always that constant … I hate to keep using this word, but in this case it's not so much *resistance*, but [the native language] … facilitates the communication.

Ms. Bautista elaborated about the process that a second language learner engages in, again drawing on her experiences as a member of a bilingual community as well as someone who had studied French for 2 ½ years. She reported, "If someone said a simple sentence to me in French … that's familiar, I would *still* take it and break it down, you know, translate." She gave an example, as follows:

> If they asked me what my name was … I would break it down, said, "She asked me what my name [was]." And then I would say, "My name is"—"Je m'appelle," and then I would go through that. So, you know, who wants to go through all of that? … It's easier [to answer in your native language]. I understand what you're saying to me [but, I'll answer in my native tongue.]

Ms. Bautista concluded, "And that's how it was when I was … growing up with Chamoru. I understand Chamoru. [But] it's easier for me to respond [in English]. Fortunately," she noted, "The speakers [of] Chamoru also understand English. So you have this bilingual communication." Referring to the circumstances of her classroom, Ms. Bautista added, "Unfortunately, I'm not a Spanish speaker, so … I can't understand [when the students answer in Spanish]. They still have to translate it. Slowly, but surely, they have to translate it." Ms. Bautista's experiences of trying to communicate and express herself in languages that were not her dominant or native tongue appeared to have enabled her to achieve a personal understanding of the multi-step process her EL learners may go through in their all-English schooling.

**Interaction Between Second Language Status and Disability(-ies)**

The third manner in which some teachers perceived an impact of students' status as non-native speakers of English on their reading achievement was in the possibility of an interaction between their second language status and the learning disability and and/or the severity and number of disabilities a student exhibited. The nature of the interaction worked in such a way that the characteristics of the learning disability (or other disabilities) made the students' task of learning to read in English more difficult than a student without disabilities would experience. In a discussion with Ms. Reinhart about how long she thinks it takes EL learners to acquire academic English, she suggested that the presence of a disability could have far-reaching effects, as evidenced in the following statement:

> I would say 3 to 4 years. But I think if they have a learning disability where they're slower in acquiring the language skills and the vocabulary, that it may, they may be behind maybe all of their … school career, depending on, I think, the complexity of the subject, you know, because each year … the subject area gets more difficult, where they will … maybe have to really struggle at it.

To check my understanding, I asked if she thought the learning disability slows downs or impedes students' ability to acquire language arts skills, and she replied, "Yes."

Ms. Janiak indicated that the impact of students' second language status on their learning language arts skills depended on the severity of the student's learning disability. She asserted, "And [learning to read in English] all depends on how severe their disability is, and how [the disability] affects their acquiring the second language. So, a lot has to do with that." She spoke about a student she had taught who "had a fairly *severe* disability area, and his was really, really hard to transfer" in learning the vowel sounds. She noted, "We still had lots and lots and lots of practice." I verified my understanding, asking Ms. Janiak, "I think what I'm hearing you say, is that … if the disability is more severe, even just learning that the letters make a different sound in English takes more time." "Uh huh. Oh, it does," confirmed Ms. Janiak. "The greater the discrepancy [the harder learning is]," she affirmed.

Some teachers asserted that in the presence of disabilities in addition to the learning disability, notably dyslexia, dysgraphia, or stuttering, the task of learning to read and write proficiently in English was more complicated than for students without the additional disability. For example, in addition to seeing interference from the native language in students' decoding, Ms. Janiak indicated that the second language element is a factor "in the writing portion. It becomes more … complex. If they have a dysgraphia of some kind, then that's going to make it even harder." Ms. Bautista reported that some students have a difficult time on a Corrective Reading exercise that presents students with words that are missing letters or parts of the word, such as word endings. Students are directed to fill in the missing letters. Ms. Bautista indicated, however, "If you have students with really severe dysgraphia or dyslexia, they're not going to be able to see

this." Thus, Ms. Bautista, too, suggested that the presence of dysgraphia or dyslexia increases the level of difficulty for students.

Ms. Bautista spoke further about her experiences with an EL learner who has both a learning disability and speech impairment. She related, "I was approached a few weeks ago by a speech therapist. And she said that José was having, you know, he was having therapy, because he's a stutterer [looks somewhat surprised]. I said, 'Oh, okay.'" Ms. Bautista explained, "[José's] type of stuttering is the pausing type.… So it's not as [obvious]." She related:

> And once I knew that, I realized. I mean, I had known that [José] would stop. And I was just thinking that it's his way of processing. But then I, when I realized that it was stuttering, it was a form of stuttering, then I just wait a little longer.

The presence of the additional disability also caused Ms. Bautista to be unsure of the source of José's difficulties. She said, "Sometimes, I'm not sure if *that's* [speech impairment] the problem … or that he really doesn't understand, or it's a [combination], both."

**Mr. LeBlanc**

> *I don't know if they have any more trouble [learning to read] than English-speaking kids learning to read. I think it's pretty much the same, in my experience.*
>
> Mr. LeBlanc

Mr. LeBlanc was the sole participant who posited that the EL learners with LD experienced no greater challenges in learning to read than did native-English speakers with LD. However, he later noted that he had realized that English is a "much harder language to learn than the language of Spanish, [in] which all of the … letters always make the same sounds." Thus, similar to the other participants, Mr. LeBlanc perceived some difficulties for Spanish-speakers in learning the English orthographic system due to

differences in transparency and consistency. He later expanded on this thought, stating that English is "a difficult language to learn … because there're so many irregular words."

Mr. LeBlanc also suggested that a student's level of English skills would impact the rate of learning he expected to see. He stated, "I would hope that once they get the hang of the … language … their rate of learning would increase to a certain degree and [the student] would be at *least* able to keep up with the other kids. I guess that's my only expectation." Thus, although Mr. LeBlanc had first indicated that EL learners with LD have no more difficulty learning to read in English than native-English speakers with LD, he later acknowledged that students' status as second language learners could hamper their efforts to learn the phonetic system of English and in students' rate of progress.

### STUDENT AND FAMILY ATTITUDES, VALUES, AND PRACTICES

> *Some of my students are still resistant.… They're just either too cool, or something.*
>
> Ms. Bautista

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was that teachers identified characteristics, attitudes, or practices of the students and/or their families as influential in the reading difficulties they observed. It should be noted that, in regard to student-related factors, teachers spoke about their students with learning disabilities in general, rather than specifically about the subset of students who, as EL learners, were the focus of the study.

### Student Attitudes and Behavior: Resistance and Non-Compliance

Teachers talked about students' stance toward lessons and their behavior and actions as detrimental to the endeavor of improving reading skills. Several participants

spoke of encountering an attitude of resistance in their middle school students. In talking about challenges she has encountered, Ms. Reinhart identified "working through [students'] attitudes." She explained that this was especially so for "the group that's the next higher one, they're probably 3rd grade level." She related, "They had a very difficult time admitting that they were having a hard time learning to read." She speculated, "And I think for so many years, they … haven't been [held responsible], they've always been put, maybe, in groups. Or they've had somebody else to … help them out with the material. That they haven't been held responsible for [reading]." She added, "And so, once we worked through [the attitudes], and I mean, we had to get [very honest], show them … reading levels and scores, and to show them where they actually were." She related that she and the other teachers had had to be "a lot more honest than I wanted to."

Ms. Bautista spoke of experiencing similar "resistance" in her students. She affirmed that "the biggest challenge … is the resistance." She reported that some of her students are "very resistant. It's like … 'I know it already.'" She commented, "You know, every day is a struggle … until they realize." Similar to Ms. Reinhart's experience, Ms. Bautista noted that the students with comparatively stronger reading skills exhibited greater resistance. She elaborated, saying, "There's another interesting … phenomenon that's happened.… The higher level students—now, those are our better readers than the other students in this class—are so cool, I mean, they don't need it. They, they are readers—comparatively speaking." Ms. Bautista indicated that to reduce the resistance, she "sometimes … give[s] them that reality check," a tactic very similar to the one employed by Ms. Reinhart and the teachers at Sánchez. Ms. Bautista reported she tells students, "'Look. You're great in here. You get a hundred percent,' and you know, 'You're getting really good grades in this class, but, realistically, you're not at your levels. So, let's get with the program.'" She noted, however, that not all students were

resistant, stating, “But it’s, it’s a struggle for individual students. Some students already know where it is, where they’re going, what they want.” She reported that some of the native English-speaking students were among the most resistant.

Two participants noted low motivation among their students. Ms. Bautista suggested that low motivation was a factor in her students’ reading. She related, “They’ve been there, they’ve done that. This is phonics. [Students are feeling,] ‘I did that when I was in kindergarten, in first grade.’” Ms. Bautista spoke about the spelling activity she has added to the CR lesson so that students will be encouraged to study the patterns and words with which they are having the most trouble. Ms. Bautista reported, “Some of them do, and some of them don’t. And you can tell which ones, you can always tell, which ones are going to succeed.”

Ms. Bautista spoke about her frustration with students’ resistance and low motivation. She said, “I do things like try to get them to do the spelling test … feed them all kinds of stuff to … give them that little extra push. Because none of it works without their own internal motivation, you know.” She stated, “If they had the … ability to do the … studying, they can study these things … but they don’t. They don’t take responsibility for that, you know?” Ms. Bautista continued:

> I can’t be up there, and … do the song and dance all the time, [and] all they say is, “I’m [bored],” “It’s boring.” Fine. My only retort to that is, “I’m not a [makes a face], I’m not here to entertain you. And if you find it so boring, why don’t you [leave]?”, you know. But that’s not nice! “Why don’t you leave!”

She related, “When I was [teaching] in [a vocational] high school [on her native island] and … the students sa[id] …‘This is boring, I don’t want to be [here],’ I says … ‘Fine. You have an option. You’re over 16. Go. Leave.’” She noted, “But that’s not an option [here].” Ms. Bautista attributed the low motivation of some students to their being young teenagers. She stated, “Motivation would be also the age group. … Teaching this kind of

program at the high school level was much easier than teaching it here." She added, "This age group continues to resist. And I'm just thinking it's also part of their nature of being middle schoolers."

Ms. Bautista indicated that Ernesto, her English-language learner who had enrolled in McKinney earlier that spring, and thus who had missed a lot in terms of the Corrective Reading program, was one of two students who was making little progress. She related her perception of the elements in play with Ernesto, which, though multiple, in large part appeared to be related to the attitude he displayed. Ms. Bautista stated, "I think if we had gotten him at the beginning of the school year, it would have been a totally different story. But he's just coming in." She indicated that Ernesto, one of the students who usually spoke in Spanish, had tested into Level A (the lowest level); however, because Ernesto's twin brother Edgar had tested into Level B1, coupled with the knowledge that there was a long-term substitute teaching Level A, Ms. Bautista said she had "thought it'd be [better]" for Ernesto to start in Level B1 in her class. Ms. Bautista reported the following:

> But we [were] already into like 15, 16 lessons. And … he knows some, and he doesn't know some. And he doesn't know a *lot*, a lot of stuff. But he doesn't care. I mean he's –It's not that he doesn't care. It's, he doesn't [care] as *much* as would be more beneficial to him. And he just thinks that he can get by with his good looks. Because he'll just go, 'Oh, Miss,' and he, you know, [can be] very charming.

Ms. Bautista appeared to attribute Ernesto's low level of concern for learning to read in part to elements of his culture. As described in Ms. Bautista's Portrait, she commented that she thought there was "more culturally in play" with Ernesto, "Attitudinally.… [He's a ] big tough guy." She perceived that he behaved as though her were "going to be taken care of," so he thinks he "doesn't really need to put out for this stuff." She commented, "It's that analogy of … getting the horse to the water. We're

here, we're [doing] as much as we're going to do. And if you won't do it yourself, if you don't intrinsically, internally know the value, then [what can we do?]" Thus, Ms. Bautista appeared to attribute Ernesto's classroom behavior largely to culturally-driven factors, whereas she spoke of the others' behavior for the most part in terms of resistance and low motivation.

Similar to Ms. Bautista, Ms. Schmidt identified students' level of motivation as a factor in their reading performance. In a discussion about vocabulary, Ms. Schmidt had indicated she probes to be sure students understand the meaning of words because she has often discovered that students have an incorrect interpretation of vocabulary because, for example, "[the word] sounded like another word." Ms. Schmidt commented with a laugh, "It's amazing what they come up with," and she reported students are sometimes "totally wrong" in their understanding of the definition or use of a particular word. Students, however, frequently do not question their interpretations of vocabulary words, which may make little sense in the sentence. Ms. Schmidt reflected that this failure to check their understanding "makes me think that they're not really visualizing and processing what they read in the first place, or they'd understand that that didn't make any sense!" She added, "So … it's a little disappointing … to say the least! That they don't stop and say, 'I don't get it.' But, I think that comes back to some internal motivation. You know … they're not interested enough to find out [the correct meaning.]"

Some participants alluded to the misbehavior and off-task behavior of their middle-school students as a possible source of problems Ms. Janiak, for example, had included good behavior management skills in her description of what a teacher would need to teach reading. She noted that she placed all students on a behavior management check sheet at the beginning of the year which parents were required to sign as a means to increase responsible student behaviors. In a similar manner, in speaking about the

reading achievement of some of her EL learners, Ms. Schmidt suggested that the behaviors of some students impeded their progress. For example, she spoke about the low grades that Daniel was earning, asserting, "A lot of it comes from not studying, you know, which is spelling or vocabulary. Not reading, not doing the reading. What else? … Not listening. And here he is, in the front again! [like Andres]." She reported that Andres, though seated in the front of the classroom, was "not a very good listener. He's busy looking, and talking to other people sometimes," off-task behaviors which she suggested contributed to his difficulty in understanding the lessons and assignments. Thus, the behaviors that Ms. Schmidt identified as impediments to growth in reading included off-task behaviors, not listening better, not reading as directed, and not studying vocabulary and spelling words.

**Family Values and Priorities: Poor Alignment with Those of Mainstream**

In addition to the characteristics and behaviors at school of the students just described, some teachers spoke about practices they perceived the families and children to engage in or, on the contrary, to eschew as influential in the students' reading difficulties. These elements are presented next.

> *If they could get some help at home or tutoring, it may be easier for them. But if they don't ha[ve that help], you know,[and] if it's just something they learned in the school, they aren't able to apply later on.*
>
> Ms. Reinhart

A few teachers perceived that there was a lack of emphasis at home on learning the language of the school. They indicated that one area where the families could do more to help their child's progress in school was in encouraging their children to practice English language skills. For example, Ms. Bautista stated that the students are "not required to speak English at home.… They're not required to practice [English.]" She

stated, “There needs to be a lot more support from the home, too. But, you know, the way these children operate … it just doesn’t seem like they’re speaking or practicing the English at home. This is the only place that they’re required to speak English, and even that, they disregard, and continue with their Spanish.” Ms. Bautista spoke about EL learners questioning her attempts to have them speak only English in the classroom, and, as detailed in her Portrait, she reported the students “become resistant, and … then, you know, there’s that power struggle. ‘I want to use my language,’ and … I can’t do anything about it.” Ms. Bautista asserted that her English-language learners speak Spanish at the expense of English at school. She related, “Every opportunity they have, they revert to Spanish. Outside, you don’t hear them conversing in English. So there is no reinforcement of that skill that they’re learning.”

Ms. Bautista also spoke about opportunities the school makes available to parents who wish to improve their English, opportunities that, she suggested, were not well utilized, as reflected in the following comment:

> I do believe that McKinney has … a class, English class … for parents. They start a class, and maybe six or seven parents come to learn how to speak better English. You know, I don’t know if, I don’t think any of these kids’ [parents come]—maybe Vigail’s parents come. Maybe they … do come, but I don’t see these other students’ [parents].

Ms. Reinhart, like Ms. Bautista, indicated that at home her students are not reinforcing English skills that they have learned in school. Indeed, the first element Ms. Reinhart identified as a contributing factor in the reading difficulties she sees amongst her EL learners was the lack of reinforcement of English at home, as evidenced in the following statement:

> I think one of the things I see a lot, is that … If they are learning the English and they’re reading the English paragraphs or whatever [in school], they maybe have Spanish-speaking parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and … then when they

> go home, they're having to go *back* to [the] Spanish language, and maybe aren't able to reinforce what they learned in English.

Ms. Reinhart continued, "And perhaps they don't have parents at home that [*sic*] read English, to … either help them with their homework, or they don't have, you know, just the support at home to reinforce the English language." Thus, Ms. Reinhart appeared to identify the absence of an English speaker in the home who could help students with their assignments and reinforce the language as instrumental in students' reading difficulties.

Some participants perceived a lack of focus on education-related practices in EL learners' homes. Teachers identified three areas related to education in which they indicated families did not provide the type or amount of support that would be beneficial to students and that would improve their children's academic skills. Ms. Bautista spoke about families not requiring students to read enough as a factor in their difficulties in reading. She noted, "Even if [the students] were required to read in Spanish [it would be beneficial]…. I know that there's research out there that says that a minimum of 20 minutes per day of independent reading can allow a student to be more successful at school." Thus, Ms. Bautista shared her awareness of research which indicates that reading in the native language is beneficial. She continued, "So, there's not that requirement to read, there's no desire to read at home, they don't understand how, how well it … can help them." Thus, Ms. Bautista appeared to perceive a lack of emphasis on learning to read in English and improving skills in English on the part of both students and their families.

Several participants ascribed a measure of their students' academic difficulties to a perceived lack of emphasis in the home on formal schooling and its associated practices. Ms. Schmidt, for example, posited that moving English-Language learners forward in their ability to handle academic materials in English was the joint

responsibility of students' parents and the school. She suggested that progressing in school is "a lot having to do with the parents' expectations." She asked, "Do they check? Did they ask them what [the students] did? Do they communicate with teachers? Do they look through their work?" Thus, Ms. Schmidt spoke of the importance of parental involvement in their children's schooling in the ways expected in the mainstream and of parents' expectations for their children.

As noted earlier, Ms. Bautista attributed some of her students' apparent lack of interest in learning to read to cultural characteristics. In particular, she attributed Ernesto's attitude in the classroom in part to the Mexican culture which, she stated, does not value education but rather emphasizes the family. She noted that this was a characteristic of cultures influenced by a history of Hispanic rule, including her own.

In a similar vein, Ms. Janiak identified the amount of focus placed on education within the family as having an impact on her EL learners' reading difficulties, although her perception of this appeared to differ from the viewpoints expressed by the other teachers. She stated, "Probably … you always say it's part of your environment.… That a lot has to do with … the focus on learning, too. because there's … more of a need of focus on survival, putting food on the table. And there's not so much [emphasis on education]." Ms. Janiak elaborated as follows:

> And … in some of the families, it's, it's not emphasized as much. It's more like, you know, maybe mom and dad are working two jobs, maybe they're not home to put that structure in for them to study. There's not that emphasis on the education, as, this is going to make your life better.

She quickly qualified this comment, however, and stated, "But I do need to correct myself, there are some families that I've met that really put a strong emphasis on education." She related her experience with one immigrant mother who "spoke no English, whatsoever," whose daughter had managed to learn to read at a 3rd grade level in

English despite having mental retardation. Ms. Janiak reported that the mother had worked two jobs, as a short order cook and in housekeeping, and had "put some of her other children through college in Mexico City." She stated that the mother "put a lot of emphasis on doing better with their lives, than what she had." Ms. Janiak asserted that the parents of her EL learners the year that the study took place had "been real good. Real supportive. It's very important to most of them. There's some that I've, you know, in years past, but this group of kiddos … the parents are very, very supportive. Very sweet parents."

Ms. Janiak, unlike most of the other participants, identified consistent, regular access to schooling as a possible factor in the reading difficulties her EL learners experienced. After speaking about the influence of students' second language status on reading, Ms. Janiak remarked that "A lot might be … having access to the educational program." She shared her understanding of schooling in some Central and South American countries gleaned from a friend that had been to Guatemala and Columbia, and "places like that.… I know that there's many, many times…. Not all children are allowed to go to school. So, that can affect [their learning]--Big gaps in their schooling."

**SUMMARY**

Participants identified several factors which they believed had impacted the reading achievement of their EL learners with LD. Those factors were organized around four themes: student characteristics related to the learning disability, the nature of students' earlier reading instruction which had failed to address students' learning difficulties, students' status as second language learners, and the attitudes, practices and values of students and families which they viewed as not helpful to students' progress.

## Description and Delivery of "Good" Reading Instruction for EL Learners with LD

In talking about their understanding of "good" reading instruction, teachers frequently wove into the discussion to varying degrees references to what they did in terms of their own classroom instructional programs and practices. Ms. Reinhart, for example, couched her answer to a question about good reading instruction entirely in terms of the CR program she was implementing, replying, "At the present time I'm real pleased with the progress the kids are making … with this Corrective Reading Program." Many of the other participants similarly made frequent references to elements or methods that were characteristic of their curriculum when describing their notion of good reading instruction for EL learners, and, therefore, I have woven data related to participants' understanding of good reading instruction into the presentation of findings related to how their teaching practices and methods reflected their knowledge and beliefs.

Though each participant had his or her own unique notion of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD and each teacher's classroom instruction differed in many aspects from that provided by the other participants, three broad themes emerged across the teachers. The first theme relates to the *nature* of participants' notion of "good" reading instruction for EL learners with LD; the second relates to the *content*; and the third relates to *methods, practices and strategies*. These themes derive from elements that were both identified by teachers as components of "good" reading instruction for EL learners and, for the themes related to content and methods, were named as factors in their students' reading difficulties. Each theme and its associated components are presented next, along with a description of how the element or practice was manifested or reflected in participants' classroom instruction, based on either observation notes or teachers' descriptions of their own teaching in interviews.

As noted in the teachers' profiles, when I asked teachers what they *knew* about teaching reading to EL learners with LD, most appeared somewhat ill at ease as they reported very little, if any, knowledge about this. For example, Mr. LeBlanc stated, "I'm sure I had at least one class period on it, but … I can't recall." In response to this question, Ms. Schmidt acknowledged, "Not very much!" and Ms. Bautista replied, "Nothing." These statements reflected the information provided in their demographic questionnaires, in that of the 5 teachers, only Ms. Janiak reported having had professional development and/or coursework aimed at developing the knowledge and skills to teach students who were English-language learners.

While asking teachers to talk about what they *knew* about good reading instruction for EL learners with LD tended to yield brief responses, asking them to talk about their *perceptions and beliefs* about good reading instruction for this population tended to yield richer, more complex constructions. It bears noting that some participants focused their discussion of good reading instruction on either curricular elements or pedagogical concerns, while others addressed both areas; for this reason, teachers' voices are not distributed evenly in these sections.

### GOOD INSTRUCTION FOR NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKERS IS GOOD INSTRUCTION FOR EL LEARNERS

In observing participants' reading instruction and in interviewing teachers about their notion of "good" reading instruction specifically for English-language learners with LD, it often was very difficult for me to discern how this instruction differed from the instruction teachers implemented with their native-English speaking students. It became evident that, explicitly or implicitly, participants perceived good reading instruction for EL learners with LD as essentially the same as good instruction for native English-speaking students with LD.

For example, when asked to describe good reading instruction for English-language learners with LD, Mr. LeBlanc had stated, “I think it’s the same as for normal kids.” Ms. Bautista had asserted at the beginning of the study, “Good or bad, I don’t know, I don’t discriminate between English-language learners, LD students, or those students who need to learn to read.” She had elaborated, “Everybody’s equal in … the treatment,” and so in her instruction, she proceeded from where students were at in terms of gaps in skills. Similarly, Ms. Schmidt had remarked, “I think that the same approach works for both, you know, to have their hands on things.” She had thus found the tactile, kinesthetic activities that she incorporated into her lessons to be effective with all of her students. In describing good instruction for EL learners, Ms. Janiak had identified “consistent structure”, conducting assessments to identify the gaps, and “start[ing] with the very basics,” though she did not indicate if or how this was different from what she did with native English-speaking students with LD. Nowhere in Ms. Janiak’s discussion of the teacher’s need to task analyze, reflect, and plan did she specifically talk about planning for the needs of EL learners.

Several teachers, however, tempered their stance by noting small ways in which the instructional needs of EL learners with LD may differ from those of native-English speakers with LD. Mr. LeBlanc, for example, acknowledged that EL learners may need “more structure, more organization that they can count on,” and that they benefited from hearing lots of language. Ms. Schmidt amended her position in sharing, toward the end of the study, that she had hit upon the strategy of pairing two Spanish-speakers, one more fluent and with higher reading skills than the other, which she had found to be very effective. Furthermore, Ms. Schmidt shared that she had found that, drawing on her knowledge of the Spanish sound system gleaned in a summer language course, she was able to help her EL learners by pointing out phonetic differences in the two languages.

Ms. Bautista also modified her position later in the study when she noted that discriminating between different learners might be called for at some point. She noted that she was finding that the EL learners were having a more difficult time with the vowels and vowel digraphs than her native English speaking students. Toward the end of the study, in light of the difficulties she noticed some of her EL learners were experiencing, she commented that perhaps next year at McKinney, teachers should "try and keep the class for the English language learners in Special Ed reading in one group and … all others in another group." She noted that the instruction for the EL learners "should go more slowly," and "spend more time on spelling and vocabulary." Similarly, Ms. Janiak acknowledged that the desire of some of her colleagues at Sánchez to have a kind of intermediate class for recently-exited students of English as a Second Language (ESL) before scheduling them into classes consisting of primarily native English-speaking students was "not a bad idea." Ms. Schmidt, though perceiving a possible benefit for English-language learners from instruction that differed in some manner from instruction designed for native English-speakers, indicated she was at a loss as to what these strategies, materials, and practices might look like. As a result, in speaking about instruction specifically geared for her EL learners, Ms. Schmidt acknowledged, "Now as far as Spanish speakers, though, you know, I just kind of take it up as it … comes along in work."

In summary, while many participants had stated in initial interviews or had implied in their description of good reading instruction that instruction for EL learners with LD was the same or almost the same as good instruction for native English-speaking students, some later modified this stance. Ms. Bautista and Mr. LeBlanc came to acknowledge that different strategies might be beneficial and/or that instruction for EL learners might be paced differently or emphasize elements such as vocabulary and

language to a greater extent than what was necessary for native English-speakers with learning disabilities. Ms. Janiak, similar to Ms. Bautista, acknowledged that providing a "middle stepping ground" for students exiting English as a Second Language classes might be beneficial for students.

## CONTENT OF READING INSTRUCTION FOCUSED ON CORE SKILL COMPONENTS

Given that most teachers reported students' Spring reading levels still in the 3rd-grade range, it is perhaps not surprising that the core skills necessary for efficient reading were spoken of most frequently in teachers' descriptions of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD; these core skills constituted the majority of reading instruction.

### Strengthen Discrete Basic Skills

#### *Decoding*

Decoding or word identification was named the most frequently by participants as an element of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD; weak decoding skills had been identified by all teachers as a factor in their students' reading abilities. In each participant's classroom, phonic instruction was, or had been at some point, provided to all students, though teachers differed in the amount of time they devoted to teaching the decoding of written English and in the method they chose to deliver decoding instruction. Those teachers whose students were assessed for the most part to be reading at late 1st through early 3rd grades (Ms. Reinhart, Ms. Bautista, and Mr. LeBlanc) regularly devoted more time to decoding instruction than the teachers of students who were, for the most part, reading at comparatively higher levels, e.g., 2nd through 4th (Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Janiak's students). The curriculum selected for reading instruction in the classrooms of Ms. Reinhart, Ms. Bautista, and Mr. LeBlanc, the Corrective Reading Program, was "basically just decoding and … fluency," according to Ms. Bautista, and many of the

daily activities emphasized decoding skills. As Ms. Bautista specified, "You start with the phonetics, the phonetic awareness, and then you move onto the phonics and the sounds, and the blending." In a similar manner, Ms. Reinhart talked of going "back to the beginning" and teaching students what they had missed in their earlier education.

Ms. Schmidt provided decoding instruction to her students through the Lexia program for approximately 20 minutes every other day; she also indicated that the passages she used in the Comprehension Station until the middle of the spring semester had been selected according to the phonetic element they featured, and thus, one could consider a portion of the time students spent at the Comprehension Station as decoding instruction and reinforcement of phonic skills. Similarly, Ms. Janiak spoke of the importance of "start[ing] with the very basics" of the "sound-symbol" relationship. She explained that because some of her EL learners "didn't have a whole lot of sound-symbol association going" at the beginning of the year, she began the year with teaching "the linguistics," or the phonetic system of English. Furthermore, she, too, utilized the Lexia program to reinforce decoding skills, though just for a few students rather than for every student in the class. Thus, teachers indicated that decoding instruction was critical for these students. As Ms. Schmidt noted, "If they can't decode it, they're just stuck."

***Fluency***

Though only Ms. Bautista spoke about the slow rate at which her students read and identified fluency as a factor in students' below-grade level reading achievement, both she and Ms. Schmidt identified fluency instruction as a component of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD and most participants addressed reading fluency to some degree in their classrooms. Ms. Schmidt described fluency as the "third part" of reading instruction, after decoding and comprehension, and noted that students needed practice in reading fluency. She remarked on the close link between improving decoding

skills and the resulting increase in fluency. Reading fluency was addressed in Ms. Schmidt's classes through the timed decoding activities in Lexia and through having students engage in the reading of connected text.

The CR teachers, that is, Ms. Bautista, Mr. LeBlanc, and Ms. Reinhart, addressed reading fluency through the timed reading activity that was a part of every lesson, which students completed in pairs. As noted**,** Ms. Bautista spoke about her students' low levels of fluency, noting that her higher-skilled students can read with very few errors but still only read, for example, 112 words per minute, when they should be reading much more quickly—"160 at this level"—in these below-grade level materials. She noted that the way to improve students' fluency was through "reading. They need to do their own reading. Which, they're not." She asserted, "So one of the things that I'm going to incorporate … next year is, I'm going to bring back Sustained Silent Reading." Ms. Reinhart included fluency instruction in her list of skills she felt good reading instruction for EL learners with LD should include, and she mentioned fluency as one of the areas addressed in the CR curriculum. She further indicated that building students' repertoire of sight words was an element of good reading instruction.

Although all Corrective Reading teachers were thus observed providing explicit fluency instruction and the remaining two participants provided opportunities for students to build their fluency, neither Mr. LeBlanc nor Ms. Janiak had identified fluency in their description of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD nor as a problem for their students. Nonetheless, Mr. LeBlanc addressed this skill through the timed partner reading exercise included in the CR lessons, while students in Ms. Janiak's classroom read connected text and some students worked on Lexia, thereby developing speed and accuracy in word-reading.

***Spelling***

Both Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Bautista included spelling instruction in their description of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD, spoke of a need for spelling instruction, and subsequently devoted a portion of their classroom instruction to improving students' spelling skills. In Ms. Schmidt's classroom, the teaching assistant, Ms. Ramírez, provided the spelling instruction. The spelling words tied in to the lesson students worked on in the Comprehension Station with Ms. Schmidt, and thus, until Ms. Schmidt switched from Bonnie Kline stories to chapter books, spelling lessons emphasized elements of the English phonetic system, for example, words containing diphthongs and r-controlled vowels. The Red and Yellow groups had a set of spelling words drawn from their reading passage, and the Green and Blue groups had a different set of words drawn from their higher-level passage. As noted earlier, Ms. Schmidt commented that she would like to have two periods to teach reading, one of which would be focused on teaching decoding and "encoding," for, as she noted, "that's what spelling is."

Ms. Bautista felt so strongly about the importance of increasing students' spelling skills that she had modified the Corrective Reading program to include a spelling component. She shared that she had noticed her EL learners were having particular difficulty in learning the vowel sounds of English. She further indicated that, if McKinney were to provide reading instruction for EL learners with LD in a setting separate from the native-English speakers with LD the following year, this instruction should "spend more time on spelling and vocabulary" than what was called for in the CR lessons, as students would "need more practice in spelling those words." To address her students' need to improve their spelling, Ms. Bautista had added a weekly spelling activity to the other activities she did. Though spelling was not part of the CR program,

Ms. Bautista had wanted a means to prod students to review and focus more on the words with which they were having particular trouble.

## Beyond Decoding and Encoding to Comprehension and Vocabulary

### *Comprehension*

Comprehension was the component named the second most frequently in teachers' descriptions of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD that was observed in their teaching or descriptions of their own instruction, though, as with decoding, not all teachers put the same emphasis on teaching comprehension to their students. Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Janiak, the two teachers not utilizing the CR program, and who worked with higher-skilled students, allotted significantly more time to improving students' comprehension skills than did the CR teachers.

Comprehension was taught with very different methods in the classrooms of Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Janiak. In Ms. Schmidt's reading class, comprehension was taught through questioning students periodically and asking them to predict what might happen next as they read a brief passage, or, later, a chapter book. In her language arts classroom, comprehension was addressed via Ms. Schmidt's directing students to "make a picture" of both *seen* text and *unseen* text as they listened to a story she read aloud to the class. A few students were later asked to share their sketch with the others, identify the portion of the story they had drawn, and explain if the elements depicted were from *seen* or *unseen* text. She also linked vocabulary development to improved comprehension. Additionally, before beginning to read aloud, Ms. Schmidt summarized for the class what had occurred in the story the day before, and she regularly asked students who took turns reading aloud to summarize their segment. At the conclusion of the lesson, she asked for a volunteer to summarize the day's reading, which she questioned and probed to clarify and deepen understanding.

Ms. Janiak elaborated in detail about elements of her comprehension instruction and had very clearly defined goals for her comprehension instruction. She spoke about wanting students to be able to understand at the level of the sentence, to understand "what is this sentence about—Is it a person, place, you know, subject-predicate, that kind of thing." Instruction then moved from understanding the unit of the sentence to go much further and be able to "skim, to identify the subject," and locate the main idea and supporting details in text. She wanted students understanding paragraphs and the entire passage. She also spoke of teaching students to outline and to summarize expository text. To achieve this level of comprehension, Ms. Janiak taught students strategies to understand the structure of both narrative text and expository text with the Story Form and Report Form strategies, components of the Project Read curriculum which Ms Janiak implemented in her classroom. Specifically, Ms. Janiak taught students to "skim to identify the subject," and then to predict the number of *key facts* or main ideas in a passage, which she likened to "sift[ing] through, finding … the gold nuggets."

As noted, although most of these teachers mentioned comprehension as a component of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD, and also identified poor comprehension as a factor in their students' reading achievement, the CR teachers allotted a much smaller portion of their classroom instruction to comprehension activities.

In speaking about comprehension instruction in the CR program, Ms. Bautista, for example, pulled out a student CR manual and, flipping through the pages, noted, "Here's some comprehension.… Just very, very minimal.… This [program] is basically just decoding and … fluency. They have a little bit of [comprehension], but it's all very low level comprehension questions." She added, "But even that, [the students] have a hard time pulling out the information real quickly.… They're not able to pull out the information and just summarize it in their mind." She reported that due to the focus of the

program, she had not "spent enough time with that comprehension part." In Ms. Reinhart's description of her instruction in her CR reading class, she echoed Ms. Bautista's comments, stating simply, "We're starting … some comprehension questions," thus implying that, as in the other CR classrooms, comprehension instruction had not been a focus of instruction.

Mr. LeBlanc did not mention comprehension instruction in his description of what he taught in his CR reading class, but he had spoken at length of his students' problems with comprehension. He had reported that students' lack of success with his language arts projects and activities the year prior to the study had been due "less [to] problems with decoding than … understanding what they were reading." In the same vein, he had identified lack of comprehension as a factor in his students' difficulties with *The Hobbit* book-on-tape unit done at the beginning of the year the study took place. In regard specifically to his EL learners, Mr. LeBlanc had shared that he had learned that "if English isn't your primary language, it knocks you down a few levels in … simple comprehension of what's expected of you."

In Mr. LeBlanc's language arts class, he addressed comprehension by having students periodically (e.g., at the end of the chapter) write down three "quiz" questions about their reading, along with the answers, based on the books students read silently on their own in class. He noted that he had realized that teaching students "what a good question is" was something he "should have taught to them more," but that this was "one small step" that he "took for granted this year." Thus, reading comprehension in Mr. LeBlanc's language arts class was broadly addressed at a very literal level of understanding. Mr. LeBlanc provided instruction in more nuanced skills, such as separating more important information from less important details, as it came to his attention that a student was not succeeding in creating "quiz" questions. For example,

during one classroom observation in Mr. LeBlanc's language arts class, I saw him pause to provide individual instruction to a student in how to tell what was more important in a story. Mr. LeBlanc provided this mini-lesson in response to the questions he observed on the student's paper, in an apparent effort to guide the student to create more meaningful questions.

***Vocabulary***

Many participants noted that vocabulary was a factor in the reading achievement of their EL learners with LD, however only Ms. Schmidt addressed vocabulary development in a systematic manner. Although Ms. Schmidt did not specifically name vocabulary in her description of good reading instruction, it became clear that she included vocabulary development under the umbrella of comprehension instruction. She also had identified vocabulary as an area of need for her students, as evidenced in her comment that "vocabulary is certainly important.… You see it in their writing, as well, that it's missing." To support vocabulary acquisition, Ms. Schmidt assigned a vocabulary list of words drawn from the week's reading passages. She had taken the step of obtaining children's dictionaries so that students would understand the definitions of the vocabulary terms she required them to look up and copy down on a weekly basis. To further enrich students' vocabularies, Ms. Schmidt also talked about the meaning of selected words as they were encountered in the passages and stories the students read. She had also taught students how a prefix changes the meaning of a word and gave examples to illustrate this concept.

Two CR teachers, Ms. Bautista and Ms. Reinhart, included vocabulary in their descriptions of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD. Ms. Bautista, for example, specifically noted that instruction for EL learners with LD should "spend more time on … vocabulary," which included opportunities for "using the words more in

context." She observed that there was a need to discuss the meaning of idiomatic language, which her EL learners did not understand. She did this periodically as the class moved through the CR lessons, though she noted that, "because this is a decoding program, I … don't think I've spent enough time" on building students' comprehension." Ms. Reinhart, too, mentioned vocabulary in her brief description of good reading instruction and noted that she skimmed over the lesson before she taught it to identify terms and expressions which she believed would be unfamiliar to her students. Thus, though these teachers named vocabulary development as a component of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD, it was addressed only incidentally in their classrooms.

Mr. LeBlanc and Ms. Janiak did not mention vocabulary development as an element of good reading instruction, but these participants did note that vocabulary development was an area of need. For example, Mr. LeBlanc stated, "obviously [EL learners] understand far less. They have a … smaller vocabulary." Mr. LeBlanc talked of EL learners benefiting from "inundat[ing] [them] with the …words." He noted, "The more [words] they get, the better they understand." Thus, for Mr. LeBlanc, one means of improving the comprehension of EL learners was via surrounding these students with language, and in particular, with comprehensible input, that is, he explained, "language that's at their level in English."

In practice, similar to Ms. Bautista, Mr. LeBlanc and Ms. Janiak clarified vocabulary in their classes as it came up in the day's instructional activities. Specifically, Mr. LeBlanc regularly clarified the meaning of some of the words in the lesson, and as part of CR, conducted mini-lessons on potentially confusing words such as homonyms and contractions. In Ms. Janiak's language arts class, words used in the warm-ups to illustrate various phonetic patterns were explained or defined. Similarly, less familiar

words appearing in the summary sheets she provided to students as they read *Number the Stars* were explained. Ms. Janiak commented, "Vocabulary development.… It's good to keep introducing new words. Try to parlay it with something that they know." Ms. Janiak also noted that vocabulary had been "one of the lowest [areas]" on the state-wide assessment for students in both the general and special education programs at Sánchez, thus reflecting her awareness of a need to address vocabulary with all students at her school.

**Exposure to Extended Text**

Another element both Ms. Janiak and Ms. Schmidt spoke about was the importance of providing students with experience in reading extended passages as a component of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD. Ms. Janiak reported that students are not accustomed to reading passages longer than a page; when they encounter the 2- and 3-page passages in the state-wide assessments, students appear frightened and unsure. Ms. Janiak noted that students should "become comfortable" with longer passages and furthermore, that they should be exposed to "stories, and stories, and stories," implying wide reading. Ms. Janiak accomplished this goal in part by assigning a novel, which students read in their classroom book sets while simultaneously listening to the accompanying taped rendition provided by the publishers.

Similarly, Ms. Schmidt talked about the importance of having students read extended text, and noted that in reading passages longer than "just a two and a half page story," the vocabulary "repeats itself," which she perceived to be beneficial to students. She incorporated lengthier reading materials in her instruction with all groups in mid-spring when she moved from Bonnie Kline stories to chapter books; the group that finished their chapter book before the end of the school year went on to read a short play

in a school magazine. Ms. Schmidt also took students to the library so that they could have time to select a book or two to borrow and read on their own.

## METHODS, STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES EMPHASIZE DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Compared to the content of participants' instruction, there was greater variability in teachers' descriptions of *how* best to teach reading to EL learners with LD, though several practices were mentioned by more than one teacher.

### Direct Teach Methods of Instruction

Most participants spoke about direct instruction as the preferred method to teach students with learning disabilities, and many attributed a portion of the current reading difficulties their students experienced to whole language instruction in their earlier reading education. Ms Bautista, for example, related the following about her students' previous instruction and the resulting reading difficulties students manifested:

> [Students] maybe … started phonetically. That's why it looked familiar. And then they went into the whole language… and after that it was just trying to … not so much be reading, but then they go into the … spelling and the language arts. And … the further [the students] got along without the basic structure having been in place, the more they lagged behind.… Exponentially, [the gap] gets larger. It doesn't decrease, it increases. And that's where we are at this school. They don't have strong basics.

Ms. Bautista spoke about attending a Corrective Reading presentation prior to McKinney's adoption of the program, and commented that the strength of the research findings that supported the effectiveness of the direct instruction method, on which CR is based, was very convincing. She spoke at length about whole language instruction, but noted that the problem with it was "not so much that it's inappropriate, but it's probably not enough time." She related that students all learn at different rates, with some needing more time to master a concept or skill than others. "But, school years, and [the]

curriculum … does not allow that." Ms. Bautista noted, "You know, we all move at the same pace at the same rate to the next year."

Ms. Janiak talked of the importance of directly teaching skills to students, a practice she reported that she emphasized particularly in the beginning of the year when she was introducing a new skill. Ms. Janiak noted that, because she had majored in special education, she had been trained to teach students with disabilities in a very direct manner, and she follows a "very sequential approach." Ms. Janiak, like Ms. Bautista, made several comments about direct instruction compared to the whole language approach. She related that if her students had been able to learn successfully under a less-direct policy of having students "just try and figure it out," they would have become accomplished readers by the time they reached middle school. She stated that she had found it necessary to directly address the skills to be taught and she asserted that good reading instruction for EL learners incorporated a "direct teach approach."

Ms. Reinhart implied that direct instruction was a feature of "good" reading instruction in her statement that she was pleased with the progress her students were making in the CR program. As noted earlier, Ms. Reinhart stated that students' previous instruction may have been whole language, and therefore students "just missed this phonics." Mr. LeBlanc did not talk about a preferred method to teach reading to EL learners with LD, and just stated that good instruction for non-native speakers of English with LD "is the same as for normal kids." However, he, like Ms. Reinhart and Ms. Bautista, employed direct instruction and incorporated repetition and multiple opportunities for students to respond and participate throughout the CR lessons.

**Specific Strategy: Repetition and Review**

Ms. Janiak and, mid-way through the study, Ms. Bautista indicated that repetition and/or review were components of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD and

identified a corresponding need in students for multiple exposures in order to master a new skill or learn a concept. However, other participants *either* identified repetition and reinforcement as a feature of their classroom practice (thereby implying that this was a feature of good instruction) *or* identified the need for lots of repetition as a factor in their students' reading achievement.

As noted, Ms. Bautista had modified her position about reading instruction for EL learners such that she stated she had come to see that some students were "derailing themselves" with the current program. She asserted that in terms of vocabulary and spelling, the EL learners "are going to need more practice in spelling those words, [and] in using the words more in context," thus implying that more work in spelling and vocabulary acquisition would be beneficial for EL learners. Similarly, Ms. Schmidt had noted that longer reading passages are beneficial for students in part because "the vocabulary repeats itself," which she indicated was helpful. In addition, for three quarters of the year Ms. Schmidt used Bonnie Kline passages in the Comprehension Station that focused on a particular phonetic pattern, thus providing multiple exposures to the element being taught.

Ms. Bautista also spoke about the repetition and reinforcement of skills that is built into the CR lesson. She related that the lesson begins with decoding, "learning the sounds, read the sounds constantly … constant repetition … the reinforcement of the word." She explained that the purpose of the repetition was "to help them see the small part, then see the big part, and then bring it back together again." Mr. LeBlanc stated that EL learners "probably need to see the words and hear the words as much as they possibly can," thus implying benefits of both repetition and redundancy in language for the EL learners. However, asked whether his EL learners ever need more repetition in the lesson's activities than the native-English speakers in the class, Mr. LeBlanc stated that

he didn't think EL learners "necessarily need more support and repetition than the other LD kids. All of the kids in these classes need more support and repetition than the … book asks you to do."

**Multi-Sensory Activities**

Both Ms. Janiak and Ms. Schmidt, the two teachers who did not implement the CR curriculum, spoke about the benefits of a incorporating a variety of multi-sensory activities into their reading instruction. None of the CR teachers explicitly advocated the use of multi-sensory activities with their students.

Ms. Schmidt expressed the belief that her hands-on approach was effective for both the native-English speakers and EL learners with LD that she taught. She advocated providing opportunities for students "to have their hands on things.… Hands on the computer, hands on the … whiteboard, hands on the pencil, the cards." Ms. Schmidt gave several examples of tactile, kinesthetic, or hands-on experiences she incorporates to facilitate student learning that pertained to spelling instruction, such as having students make spelling flip-overs, having students sound out words as they spelled them, and having students write *sound pictures* on squares of paper (e.g., *ai, ea*), which they later manipulated to spell words dictated by Ms. Ramírez in spelling activities. Furthermore, Ms. Schmidt related that she allowed Andres, an EL student, to take his passages to a study carrel in the back of the room where he could read aloud, as she believed "it seems like [Andres] has to read aloud to get any of it.… 'Cause I realize he has to say it with his mouth."

Ms. Janiak, too, specified that hands-on activities are part of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD. She noted that, following her direct teaching of a skill, she "believe[s] in a lot, afterwards, a lot of hands-on." She strongly advocated the use of a "lot of VAKT [visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile]" activities. She

commented, “I try to reach all of them. … I try to make sure [that] at least, within each class, we have something that touch[es] on all of the intelligence bases.” This was evident in many activities in her class. In terms of kinesthetic and tactile elements in her teaching, Ms. Janiak noted in her description of her classroom teaching that she has a “lot of little folder activities where [students] actually move [parts of] the sentences around to create more complex [sentences], instead of, I call it, bare-bones sentences.” She further shared how, early in the first semester, she had periodically passed out small white boards and markers for students to write on as she dictated words that highlighted a phonetic pattern she was teaching. This activity had the additional benefit, as detailed in the Project Read curriculum, of allowing students to exercise “gross motor skills” to “write bigger,” after which they move to the finer motor skills required in writing on paper.

Two teachers noted the benefits of providing visual supports for EL learners. Referring to her experiences as an inclusion teacher in science, Ms. Reinhart concluded that if the students “can see a visual image of [a vocabulary term] … sometimes that helps a little bit.” Thus, Ms. Reinhart had observed EL learners’ understanding improve in other content areas with the support of visual materials.

Ms. Janiak also spoke of providing a “lot of visual” so that students “have a basic knowledge for them to go on.” Ms. Janiak provided visual support to her students in many ways. For example, in a unit in which Ms. Janiak re-introduced the reading of narrative text, she stood in front of the class and blew air into a balloon, pausing between puffs as she named important events in a story they had read. In this way, she illustrated visually that there is an inciting force and then subsequent events in the story that lead to a point where “something’s got to give,” at which point the climax occurs. To provide context and background knowledge for *Number the Stars*, a novel set in Denmark during

the Nazi occupation, Ms. Janiak brought in photographs of her family members in their military uniforms with military equipment and machines.

In addition to using visual materials to illustrate instructional concepts, Ms. Janiak used visual displays to communicate information, such as a poster depicting the flow of narrative text with symbols for each element of the story grammar (such as a circle with a line zigzagging through it to represent the climax). She also provided a visual display of a finished poster project that was to be worked on as they read the novel so that students could see what she meant as she discussed elements to be included in the finished project. Furthermore, as directed in the Project Read curriculum, Ms. Janiak stated that in teaching the linguistic strand of Project Read early in the year, she would use "little hand signals" to designate the different vowel sounds as a means to help students distinguish among the short vowel sounds, which can be a challenging task for non-native speakers of English.

Finally, Ms. Janiak provided auditory support for students in that she read aloud the questions included with the chapter summaries students worked on each day of the *Number the Stars* unit. She also played the audio recording of the novel, or, when the tape player malfunctioned, read portions of the novel aloud herself as students followed along in their books.

**Instructional Practices Driven by the Learning Disability**

Teachers named and engaged in several practices that spoke directly to students' learning disability. These included teaching at students' level of skill rather than above it; assessing initially to identify instructional targets; providing lots of structure; and using care in selecting instructional materials that "hook" or interested students but can also be read by them, given their reading abilities.

Many teachers emphasized that reading instruction should begin at the level of students' skills. Ms. Bautista, for example, noted that good reading instruction for EL learners "starts right where [the students] are." This tenet of good reading instruction speaks directly to the perception of many participants that a factor in their students' current reading difficulties was the nature of the reading instruction provided in previous grades. Ms. Bautista, for example, stated that because her students were reading at the 2nd and 3rd grade levels, previous instruction that was on a higher level had been inappropriate. She explained her thinking about this as follows:

> We find ourselves with 8th-graders who are still reading at 3rd or 4th grade level, maybe even 1st, because, they've really never mastered [decoding]. And they're still trying to figure that out. And they're stuck on trying to figure that out but everything else they've been … taught along the way became inappropriate. It's inappropriate to teach somebody 4th grade level stuff when they're still operating at 2nd grade level. That's what I meant by that.

Ms. Janiak, too, spoke of starting "with the very basics" because some of her students lacked these skills.

This notion of starting at the level of the students' abilities was evident in areas other than skills instruction. Ms. Schmidt stated that materials should be at students' level of understanding. This belief was reflected in several ways in her instruction. For example, the Bonnie Kline passages with which students worked at the Comprehension Station were written at two levels, one lower than the other, though both addressed similar phonetic features, which were the focus of instruction. When Ms. Schmidt decided to switch from Bonnie Kline passages to longer chapter books, Ms. Schmidt obtained books at three different levels of difficulty. Ms. Schmidt had also sought and obtained dictionaries written at a level that she believed was more accessible to her students.

Mr. LeBlanc addressed the element of *starting right where the students are* in his classroom language. He stated that an element of good reading instruction for EL learners was providing ample opportunities to listen to language**,** "especially language that's at their levels in English." Mr. LeBlanc indicated that he uses "more basic language" with his students so that they can understand. Similarly, Ms. Janiak stated that when she introduces a concept, she begins with very "simple" terms, thus facilitating student comprehension. However, she also noted that she uses the terms students will hear in high school, such as protagonist, because she believed it takes her students longer to learn such terms and concepts.

Assessment played a role in all participants' classrooms as the principle means of identifying students' skill levels and to determine skills and concepts to target in their instruction. In most instances, assessment results were used to group students homogeneously for instruction. Indeed, the classes of Ms. Reinhart, Ms. Bautista, and Mr. LeBlanc had been constituted according to skill level, per CR procedures. While Ms. Schmidt was unable to move students to different classrooms based on assessment outcomes, she had done the next best thing in that she had divided her students into groups within the classroom based on assessment results. These assessments were done so that instruction could more precisely target the identified areas of need of each group of students. Ms. Janiak spoke about the benefits of formal and informal assessment in thinking about instruction, and recommended that a teacher "make sure you know … what you want to do in your classroom. Where you're going to go." It should be noted here that, although the other teachers did not explicitly identify assessment as part of "good" reading instruction, all teachers spoke about assessments they had done with their students in terms that implied that they perceived the assessments to be very useful and informative. For example, Ms. Bautista spoke of the assessments allowing teachers to put

students “on their instructional level,” which she perceived as beneficial in moving them forward. She also remarked that at times she questions whether students are correctly placed because of their classroom performance, but “what’s very helpful was that I personally gave them the tests. So I know where they are.”

The third practice that appeared driven by students’ learning disabilities was in teachers’ emphasis on structure in teaching their students. Several participants spoke about the importance of consistency and structure in the classroom. Mr. LeBlanc, for example, remarked that “maybe more structure, more organization that they can count on every day” would be beneficial in particular for the EL learners among his students. The value placed on structure and consistency was again apparent in teachers’ descriptions of lesson content and delivery. Ms. Schmidt, for example, advised, “Don’t just skip around too much.” She also recommended that students “master the skill you’re working on” before moving forward. Ms. Janiak’s statements echoed this stance, as she recommended “consistent structure, consistent application of how to teach” in teaching reading to EL learners with LD. She indicated that “a very sequential approach” was most effective.

Fourth, some teachers mentioned careful selection of materials as important. Both Ms. Janiak and Ms. Schmidt talked about the thought they put into selecting materials, which they believed was important to good reading instruction. Other participants also indirectly indicated that the kind of reading materials chosen for instruction impacted students’ success with the lessons. The two aspects teachers emphasized was students’ enjoyment of and ability to comprehend lesson materials.

Three teachers directly or indirectly indicated that they thought about how to increase the appeal of lessons to students. Ms. Janiak noted that good reading instruction used “materials that interest the kids,” materials that “hook them in.” In describing what she thinks about when planning a lesson for EL learners, she spoke about “creating an

interest.… I want them to be engaged." For example, to create interest and also to illustrate the process of categorizing and coding facts in expository text, Ms. Janiak brought in an assortment of different cups, which she then asked the class to describe and place in categories. To create interest in a novel about the Nazi era, Ms. Janiak brought in old photographs of her own family members who had fought in the war dressed in their military uniforms; she also asked students to imagine elements in the novel applied to their own lives, such as finding soldiers with guns positioned on every street corner on a trip to the local grocery market.

Though only Ms. Janiak explicitly included "student interest" in her description of good reading instruction for EL learners with LD, all except Ms. Reinhart spoke of efforts to make lessons more engaging for students. For example, in speaking of the books she had selected for mid-spring reading, Ms. Schmidt had commented, "and then my … highest 7th grade … group will be doing … *Pinballs*, which is quite an interesting little book about three kids that are going to a foster home. And they're relating to the characters. It's interesting to see." Echoing Ms. Janiak's position, Ms. Schmidt added with a laugh, "Hook them in! That's what I like!" Ms. Bautista spoke of injecting energy and drama into her presentation of lessons, and of doing "a song and dance" to reduce student boredom and improve student motivation. She added that she "feed[s] them all kinds of stuff to … give them that little extra push." Additionally, Mr. LeBlanc noted that he modified the CR curriculum to make lessons "more fun for them than just rote."

The level of reading and resource materials was mentioned by two teachers. Ms. Schmidt stated that resource materials (e.g., reference texts such as dictionaries) should be at the students' level of understanding. She spoke at length of the challenges students had encountered in looking up the meaning of unfamiliar terms they encountered in their reading until she had secured dictionaries written for students in the upper elementary

grades. Although Mr. LeBlanc did not identify the need to provide materials at students' level of reading ability as a component of good reading instruction, he had talked extensively about the difficulties his students had encountered in his book-on-tape unit, *The Hobbit*, as well as with his project-based curriculum of the previous year. In his interviews, Mr. LeBlanc had attributed much of the students' difficulties to the level of complexity of the materials, including the content of web sites designed for school-aged children.

### SUMMARY

Participants identified many components of "good" reading instruction which they addressed in their instruction. Three themes emerged from interviews and observations. The first theme focused on the general perception of participants that good reading instruction for students with learning disabilities did not differ based on the students' language background. The second theme, related to content, encompassed elements pertaining to the core reading skills of decoding, fluency, spelling, comprehension, and vocabulary, as well as building stamina for longer passages. Elements related to teachers' methods, practices, and strategies constituted the third theme. Participants identified as characteristic of good reading instruction methods that use a direct teach approach and multi-sensory techniques such as employing hands-on activities and providing visual and aural support. Participants recommended practices that are commonly associated with direct instruction methods, as was the specific strategy teachers advocated of providing lots of repletion and review.

## Challenges and Successes in Teaching Reading to EL Learners with LD

The final goal of the study was to explore what teachers of reading for EL learners with LD would identify as challenges and as successes in their efforts to improve

the reading abilities of this population. I explored successes and challenges with each participant; a cross-case analysis of the elements that teachers identified revealed that, while there were common themes in the nature of the challenges and successes participants identified, there tended to be great diversity in the specific elements each teacher spoke about.

## CHALLENGES

Two themes captured the factors participants spoke about when asked to talk about any challenges or barriers they had encountered in teaching reading to EL learners with LD. The first theme relates to student characteristics such as their small gains in academic skills and their attitudes and behavior. The second theme relates to barriers posed by district or school practices and/or the teachers' inability to communicate in the native language of their EL learners.

### Student Attributes Hamper Greater Improvement

Three participants spoke about specific elements related to their students' reading skills as challenges in their efforts to improve the reading abilities of their EL learners, though each teacher focused on different areas of difficulty. Ms. Schmidt, for example, named continued problems with decoding as a challenge. She elaborated on the difficulties the EL learners experienced with decoding English words, saying,

> The letter combinations, the vowel combinations, you know, they're just … not in their language. So they're all new. And it's like learning something all over, for the first time. [Decoding] … probably takes more work and more time and attention.

She also noted that it was possible that the EL learners were "not understanding the vocabulary, and … I just don't know it." She explained, "We have tests, we have activities, but, often it's the ones with the hands up, you know, trying [that get called on] and the others are learning from them." She commented that the quieter students "can

hide sometimes." Thus, Ms. Schmidt appeared to suggest that vocabulary was another area where her EL learners might not be achieving at the desired level.

Ms. Schmidt further noted that the English-language learners, though able to gain a measure of benefit from her lessons, "may not have succeeded perhaps as much or as fast as an English-speaker." She identified the need to translate to and from the native language as a possible factor in how quickly and how well the EL learners are able to learn material, as follows:

> Maybe this just has to do with the processing.… The English to Spanish, and then back.… They're translating from English to a Spanish word they know, and then back to an English concept. And if they're not good at the English word to the concept for it … then it just takes extra time. I think that's what's happening.

Ms. Bautista remarked on her students' slow progress in reading fluency. She had reported that some of her students could read with very few errors, but at a rate of only 112 words per minute, when they should be reading much more quickly while maintaining low error rates. Not only were students reading less fluently than she had hoped, but their fluency rates were achieved on below grade level text. Ms. Bautista noted, "That could give [students] the wrong … impression, you know: 'I'm reading 112 words! And … they said … 75 [words per minute] is good, but I'm reading 112!'" She remarked, "So every once in a while I have to remind them: 'Guys! This is only 3rd grade level.… When you open up your textbook and can read to me, then we're in business."

When I asked Mr. LeBlanc to talk about any challenges he may have experienced in teaching reading to EL learners with LD, he sighed and said, "The biggest challenge and maybe the only challenge I've had so far was getting my point across in words that they can understand." He reported, "I ask them to do something, they say, 'What are you talking about?'" He concluded, "That's really all I can think of. Anything else would be just like the … regular, the other kids have." In member-checking this response, I asked

Mr. LeBlanc to elaborate and talk about what he might ask the EL learners to do that they would not understand. He responded, "For instance, 'Write three questions for each chapter' is one thing I've told every class at least 15 or 20 times." He related his thoughts about this as follows:

> I guess my problem with it is that, I'm wondering if anybody's listening. When they ask questions and I answer them, are they listening to my answers? Can they not remember my answers, is the next question I have. The third question is, do they care what my answer is? So … any of those things could be the problem, or you know, they're middle schoolers, they forget a lot. They're still kids.

Mr. LeBlanc voiced his frustration, stating with a laugh, "Everything I say, everything I instruct them to do, I have a hard time getting my point across. Unless it's, 'Let's go outside and play basketball.'" He continued, "Anything that's new to them or anything that they don't like to hear, they need to hear over and over." He laughed and added, "Sometimes, it's just awful."

Though Mr. LeBlanc did not specifically identify anything other than "getting [his] point across" as a challenge he'd experienced, it became clear in our conversations that he was frequently surprised and frustrated with his students' skill levels in the language arts. For example, in our final interview, Mr. LeBlanc elaborated on his need to reevaluate both what he was teaching and how he was teaching it. He commented,

> I'm learning more every day.… Since I spoke to you last time, I learned a major lesson.… It was just sort of … the simple breakthrough that … I realize now that I can't assume that [the students] know anything. However many years they've been in school, didn't necessarily teach them a thing.

He described what happened when he had asked the students to open a textbook and copy ten sentences onto a sheet of paper, and then underline the subject and circle the verbs in each sentence. He reported that some of the students could complete this task, but, he noted, "The biggest problem they had was figuring out where the sentence started and ended." He continued, "It was weird, I mean, talk about something new. My

goodn[ess], I just couldn't, I couldn't get over it. I couldn't understand how in the world—'Where does a sentence start, Mister?' they'd ask me." Mr. LeBlanc marveled at the gaps and inconsistencies in his students' skills, stating, "And yet, they're doing what I asked them to do, you know. It's really strange: They can write. And they can write sentences." He mused, "Maybe they just can't pick it out of context.… I don't know. I haven't figured out the answer. But I know I have to start … at a lower level."

In addition to continuing difficulties with skills important to efficient reading, three teachers named characteristics of students' attitudes and behavior as a challenge. Ms. Schmidt simply identified student "behaviors" as challenging, though she noted that this was a problem "just in general, that's not … pinpointed to any particular kind of speaker." When asked if there had been anything she might consider a challenge in her efforts to provide good reading instruction for English-language learners with learning disabilities, Ms. Reinhart had identified and spoke about just one element, asserting, "One of the biggest challenges was working through their attitudes." She spoke about the group of students she taught who were working at the next higher level (approximately 3rd grade) than the class I had observed, stating, "They had a very difficult time admitting that they were having a hard time learning to read." She recounted her thoughts about why she had encountered more "attitude" from the students with comparatively higher reading skills, stating, "I think for so many years they … haven't been [held individually responsible], they've always been put, maybe, in groups. Or they've had somebody else to help them out with the material. That they haven't been held responsible." She continued, "And so, once we worked through that—and I mean, we had to get, show them … reading levels and scores, and to show them where they actually were [before their attitudes improved]." Thus, Ms. Reinhart indicated she had felt the need to be "very

honest—a lot more honest than I wanted to" with students about their reading skills in order to change their attitudes about the importance of reading instruction.

In each interview with Ms. Bautista, students' resistance, attitudes, and/or lack of motivation had come up during our conversations; when asked to talk about the challenges she has encountered, Ms. Bautista named student resistance as a significant element in the classroom. She remarked, "The challenge is … whether they're ELLs or … LDs … the *resistance*. That's the *biggest* challenge … the resistance that we've had to [deal with.]. And there *is* still resistance. You know, every day is a struggle, until they realize." She noted that some students resist more than others, and speculated on the reason for the resistance she has experienced, stating, "[Some] young people in the room, they're denying themselves because they think they're [beyond this], this is too baby[ish]. Or boring, or … whatever their perception.… And it's getting to be butting heads at this point." She added, "I'm just thinking it could … [also] be because we're … down the line, and they've already got 'summeritis' [chuckle]." Ms. Bautista also attributed the resistance and low motivation exhibited by some students to "the age group," as reflected in her assertion, "This age group continues to resist.… I'm just thinking it's also part of their nature of being middle schoolers."

**System-Based Constraints to Greater Gains**

A second theme that captured the challenges and barriers that participants spoke about was the impact of system-based factors that teachers viewed as impeding greater improvement in students' reading skills. For example, two participants identified their inability to communicate in their English-language learners' native tongue as a challenge, though for different reasons. When I asked Ms. Bautista to talk about any challenges that she had experienced in teaching reading to her EL learners with LD, she began by referencing the language difference between her EL learners and herself, stating, "The

challenge of … not being able … to speak Spanish. So that I can explain to them." She related that when she had taught back on her island, she "never spoke to [the students] [in Chamoru] … unless [the lesson] was really, really difficult." Thus, if students were struggling to understand the lesson, she was able to communicate in Chamoru to help them comprehend. She noted that in her present teaching assignment, when the lesson was really difficult and she saw students struggling, "sometimes, I feel like I—I wish I could be able to explain it to them in a different way so that they can understand it." She added, "Even if it's in Spanish. So that they can make the connection back to the English." Thus, Ms. Bautista indicated that being able to speak the home language of the students would have given her an additional tool with which to explain and teach content, a support she had been able to provide to her students in her native land but not to her Spanish-speaking students.

Ms. Janiak, on the other hand, identified the inability to have spontaneous communication between parents and herself whenever either party desired it as a challenge in her work with EL learners with LD. She related, "Challenging is making sure—the parents are always good, but I wish I could just speak more with the parents, probably. With the families." She indicated that not being able to speak the language of her students' families was a barrier for families, too, when family members called to speak with her regarding their student. "They'll call here, and I goes, 'Oh, no. No habla el español. No habla el inglés, okay, Who knows how to speak Spanish here!" She commented, "You can't just pick up the phone. You have to find somebody [who can translate.]" Thus, in contrast to Ms. Bautista who spoke of wishing to use the native language to help students understand instruction better, Ms. Janiak emphasized the barrier to spontaneous communication between the home and school raised by her inability to speak and understand Spanish.

Two participants spoke of challenges or barriers related to characteristics of the school and district or the system within which they taught. Ms. Bautista identified as a challenge the breadth and number of demands placed on special education teachers under the system utilized in the District to manage the education of students with identified disabilities. In talking about making greater efforts to involve parents next year, she remarked with a harried expression "It's like, Whew! Everything is [new]—You know, this is the first year I've taught the cooking class and this [Corrective Reading] class, and I'm going, 'Oh!'" She added, "And, actually, 7th grade language arts [is new for me].… I taught 8th grade language arts last year. And so, three, all three new programs of—flying off the cuff." She later added, "I have my issues about the time special ed teachers are given to teach," and elaborated, saying, "All special ed teachers teach at least three different subjects, at three different levels. And a lot of us are still new to the system. And on top of that, we're special ed teachers, [and] we have the … folder teacher system."

I asked Ms. Bautista what the folder system entailed, and she elaborated on this system in place in the District that ensured that special education services were provided to students with identified disabilities. She indicated that the folder system gave special education teachers responsibility for a group of students—their *folder students*—being served through special education, stating, "We have to keep track of their progress, contact parents … have [IEP meetings], annuals, and re-eval[uation]s, and all the documentation … [create and monitor] goals and objectives, and I just [shakes head].… That's … my issue." Duties and responsibilities for these *folder students* are distinct from the special education teacher's full schedule of classroom teaching duties; depending on the subjects and grade level(s) a special education teacher teaches and the nature of the educational program(s) of his or her folder students, a special education teacher may not teach many (or even any) of his/her folder students, and so may lack first-hand

knowledge of the students' academic skills and behavior. Ms. Bautista appeared to view the folder system as problematic for special education teachers.

In addition to concerns related to the work load of special education teachers, Ms. Bautista also spoke about the challenges inherent in the classroom that made it difficult to individualize for students, a practice which, in conjunction with very small class sizes, she indicated would be best. She stated:

> If, in a perfect situation, [if] I had 2 or 3 students to work with, and … we go further into modification, and making all the allowances that we can, and putting all the support and the resources that they need, for each of them.… He's at this perfect level, he's got all these words that he's … needing to study, and he's doing it. And I'm working with her, and she's got her own [individualized work]. You know, individualized instruction is the ideal.… But we don't have that luxury.

Ms. Bautista thus indicated that if she had a very small group and "could individualize, individually instruct, or … create programs to instruct these students on a one-on-one" wherein she could address each student's specific needs based on their individual characteristics, then, she stated, "that's probably where I would be … learning all the practices, learning what I need to know about all of these [student characteristics]."

She indicated, however, that this was not possible under current conditions. Ms. Bautista indicated that though her students had been grouped according to reading levels in the fall, and thus, her classes had been fairly homogeneous in terms of students' strengths and weaknesses in reading skills, this was no longer so in April because students tend to progress at different rates. In terms of students' rate of progress, she stated,

> It's an individual thing. And isn't that the irony of the situation. It's individual, and it's very frustrating. We have to take the child as [an] individual, each learning [different] skills.… But when we go to teach, it's, "Everybody, let's do it together."

Ms. Bautista's comments reflect the competing approaches of instruction for students with identified disabilities: individualization based on each student's specific strengths and needs, and whole-group, choral activities or programs. She reported how she handles the differences and acknowledged a tendency to teach to the middle abilities of the students in a class, as follows:

> I fall back into the–I'm teaching to this *group*. And whatever the median of this group is, as low … as it is, that's what I'm going to have to teach to. Because, you know, the reality of the matter is, I don't have … We don't have the luxury of one-on-one instruction.

She remarked:

> You teach to the middle and the really bright students are going to learn anyways, and the really low students are going to drag along. But we've got the middle. And … that's what we do even with the low level. And I have to admit it. That's my reality. Reality is … a very hard thing to deal with, with our students.… It … frustrates me greatly.

She concluded, "I'm trying to pull them all together. I'm working towards the middle. Where everybody can find common ground."

The common ground, Ms. Bautista seemed to imply, is instruction that every student should be able to learn from, that is, instruction at a level which is neither so far above the abilities of the lower-skilled students that success is precluded, nor so easy that the higher-skilled students have nothing to learn from the curriculum. Ms. Bautista indicated that she found that some of the students thought they were way above the level of the instruction, and she mused, "Maybe I should be considering moving them faster than this. And see, that … again, is the balance that … I walk. Very, very narrow balances." She indicated that the students were "getting bored" because "they're frustrated and want to give up," though she noted, "Those in the middle are just [moving along]. Gilberto is just doing fine!" She declared, "Thank goodness for the middle! Give me hope every day!" She commented later, "We just do the best we can every day."

Ms. Janiak stated that a challenge she has encountered at her school is in "the openness of some of the teachers, possibly." She indicated that a few teachers who worked with EL learners had expressed a need for "a different program besides just the ESL program and then right into regular" classes, a sequence which was the established procedure in the district in which the study took place. Ms. Janiak later appeared to agree with her colleagues that this "intermediate approach" the teachers were calling for "wouldn't be such a bad idea." She thus appeared to have come to believe that this approach, which she characterized as "almost like a weaning process," had the potential to be beneficial for EL learners.

**SUCCESSES**

In addition to exploring teachers' challenges in teaching reading to EL learners with LD, I also asked participating teachers to talk about their successes. I purposely left the notion of success open so that teachers might talk about anything at all, including, for example, teaching ideas that they had implemented, materials they had found to be particularly effective, teaching and/or discipline procedures they had found beneficial, training they had undergone or skills they had acquired that increased their effectiveness or made their work easier, effective ways of collaborating with families, the establishment of particular policies or strategies that facilitated working effectively with other teachers or administrators, and building-based supports or activities. Three themes were discernable in the elements that teachers identified as successes with their English-language learners with LD. Specific elements pertaining to each theme were at times diverse, just as was noted in the area of challenges.

**Gains in Language Arts Skills**

All five participants named gains in students' reading abilities as a success. Ms. Schmidt reported seeing her students "move up the [Lexia] program's levels" and stated that she could remind students about skills taught in Lexia to guide them to correct their written work. When I asked Ms. Janiak to talk about successes she might have experienced in teaching reading to EL learners with LD, she replied, "Gains in reading. I've really seen gains." Mr. LeBlanc stated that he could name "nothing special at all" as a success he had experienced with his EL learners with LD, "Just the same that you could say for any group of kids. Which is just progress."

Similarly, Ms. Bautista spoke in general terms about the progress in reading that she had observed in her students, reporting about an EL learner whom she had taught for two and a half years, "[Vigail] was here [motioning near] and now she's here [laugh] [motioning a little further away]." Regarding Vigail's reading gains, she asserted, "I know it's [due to] the program. Because … I had Vigail for reading then, and … she was not a reader at all." She reported, "[Vigail] is reading a whole lot better," but noted ruefully, however, " She still takes out [from the library] some really really basic [books]." Ms. Bautista reported noting similar improvements in the reading of Gilberto, as well, stating:

> Gilberto … was very hesitant, too.… He's made great gains! … As I mentioned before, he was the one that tested into Level A, but then I decided I'd take him [into Level B1] because that class was too … full—although he was one of those that may have been the lowest in the class. He has now been [reading], and is at par with … the higher students here. And his reading is much more … meticulous. It's improved a lot more.

She reported that students who used to avoid reading in class "are reading, even if they are reluctant to read out loud, because … they can read."

Ms. Reinhart noted that she had seen gains in students' reading, and commented, "Even today, it was 55 words, and all of them were able to do it in less than a minute." The fluency score reflects a student's accuracy as well as speed, and thus, Ms. Reinhart's students had become both better able to decode words as well as faster in this endeavor. Additionally, though she did not specifically identify students' increased awareness of words as a success, Ms. Reinhart had commented in a positive manner a few times on students' increased ability to see patterns across words. She remarked, "One thing that they are picking up themselves, which I found very interesting yesterday, are the words that rhyme." She elaborated on this as follows:

> I had the col[umns], the rows on the board, and they're starting to pick out rhyming words. And before, they could find it, like, if they were in the same column, [with] one [word] right after the … other one. But now, the other day, they're finding them over … like maybe the 1st column and the 3rd column.… They can transfer, you know, they can see the similarities in words.

She noted, "I think they're finding that there's more they can do with these words, now … rhyming, and, so, a *new* awareness [of words]." Thus, she had noticed that students' fluency had increased along with their ability to decode words and to discern patterns across words.

Ms. Reinhart spoke about another area where students have made gains, stating, "The language arts resource teacher said the writing has improved a lot. That it still may not be spelled correctly, but it's mo[re], it's phonetically correct.… They're able to put thoughts on paper like that." I asked for elaboration regarding improvements in writing. Ms. Reinhart explained that the improvements were noted in the areas of "spelling, as well as adding details to sentences." She summed up, "So … yes … we have seen [gains] in other areas."

**Positive Trends in Affective Elements**

Teachers spoke about noticing improvement in students' self-confidence and an increased enjoyment in the reading lessons on the part of students. Three teachers identified as a success greater self-confidence in reading and other areas among their students. Ms. Bautista noted of one of her EL learners, "the confidence that I see, I can … attribute that to the reading success." She reported that the girl in question was "much more outgoing, too" and no longer "just sticks with a group of Spanish-speaking students." Similarly, Ms. Janiak commented, "I see kids like Berenice just—she smiles so much more. She's a very sweet child." Similar to Ms. Bautista's conclusion, she added, "They're building [self-esteem].… If they're successful, then they're going to feel better about themselves." Thus, these teachers attributed the increases in self-confidence and self-esteem to students' gains in reading skills.

Ms. Reinhart mentioned the positive changes she has noticed in students' thinking about their own ability to read and their attitude toward reading in general. She spoke about the change she has observed, relating, "I know, even at the beginning [when handed something to read] … they would [say], 'Oh, well, whatever.'" She reported, however, that once students reached the point where they were "doing the sounds, breaking them down, [and the students] had started … tracking with their fingers," they "have started … trying to sound out the words more than they originally did." She shared her thinking about the evolution of this change in students as follows:

> I think reading, for some of these [students]—especially with my group that is so low—they've never *read*.… Now they can pick up something and they can go ahead and they can *see*, you know, "I know some of these words."

She commented later on this positive development, "I think a lot of times they're just handed things, and they stick it in the pocket because—Hey! [They couldn't read it

anyway].” She stated, “But they’re at least *trying* to work through it. And I just think it’s a new … sense of self-accompli[shment], that they *can* do it.”

Ms. Reinhart stated that several content area teachers had similarly reported seeing students’ “confidence just build,” noting that “several of [the students] raise their hand and ask to read out of a 6th grade social studies book.” Ms. Reinhart also reported specifically about an EL learner she taught who, at the beginning of the school year, used to refuse to read out loud. She related, “Angelica was very *very* shy. She would come into the room, she said, ‘Miss, I *can’t* read.’ And … she admitted that to me right at the beginning—she couldn’t read.” Ms. Reinhart reported that Angelica would ask her not to call on her to read in front of the other students. She continued, “And now, I mean … We wait till she’s ready … but, there have been times when she’s wanted to go *first*, now.” Thus, these three teachers indicated that some of their students have acquired greater confidence in their ability to read and have developed a more positive stance toward reading.

Finally, though Ms. Reinhart did not specifically identify students’ increased ability to provide academic assistance to one another as a success, she raised this positive development she had noticed in her students in an interview. She reported that she has observed that her students have started to help each other read, which she indicated was “probably the first time they’ve been in an academic situation where they were able to kind of be the leader.”

Additionally, two CR teachers identified as a success the more positive manner in which students had begun to respond to the reading program. In comparing how the class worked through the CR lessons in the fall and in the spring, Ms. Bautista spoke of being able to move more quickly through the lessons with fewer breaks, stating, “The immediate success is our ability to move quickly.… [We are] moving much more

smoothly." She recounted that in the fall, students would ask for a day off from the program, which slowed their progress through the book. She reported, "We're able to go straight through now. And the only break we have is to do a spelling test, and [then] we get right into the book." She also reported a change in students' attitude toward the program, stating, "the resistance level has dropped dramatically," though she noted that there were still a few who continued to resist," but there were "very few of them, now."

Ms. Reinhart commented that her students had begun to enjoy some of the activities, noting, "They've really responded to the timed readings." She reported that the students liked to graph the number of words that they had read correctly and compare how many errors they had made. She stated, "They really like that."

**Success with Effective Strategies**

The two teachers who did not follow the Corrective Reading program identified strategies or practices which they had found effective with their EL learners. Ms. Janiak spoke emphatically about the success of the multi-sensory, direct instruction methods of the Project Read curriculum with all of her students, stating, "That's why I became [a Project Read teacher]. I saw gains when I did Life Skills when I used Project Read." She asserted that the success of the Project Read program was because, "We were giving the kids something that they were familiar with to be able to decode a word." She also expressed satisfaction with gains the students were making on the Lexia program, noting, "It's been really good for the … real low readers. Anybody reading 3.0 and below."

When I asked Ms. Schmidt to talk about any successes she might have experienced in teaching English-language learners, she responded with a laugh and then observed, "I guess I've never really thought about it too much before. Because I wasn't … *focusing* on the *differences*." She paused and then talked about being able to highlight differences between the sound systems of Spanish and English, and in that way she has

been able to help the EL learners achieve more success in decoding English words. She reported:

> For instance, today … [Elena] was saying /ee/ in a word … that she was reading … and I said that [the letter] said that … in Spanish.…And she was able … to go back and, "Oh, yeah." So I mean, they're … *getting* it.

Ms. Schmidt identified some additional successful practices she had used with her EL learners and some she utilized with all learners. For example, she identified as beneficial for her EL learners the strategy of pairing a lower-skilled bilingual student with a higher-skilled bilingual student, something she had hit upon out of desperation one day. Ms. Schmidt also reported success with allowing an EL learner who "has to say it with his mouth" in order to understand the opportunity to move to a study carrel in the back of the room so that he can read aloud without disturbing the other students. An additional strategy Ms. Schmidt used with the same student was to reduce the number of items he must complete, thus modifying "not quality, but, how many can you get done, correct."

Finally, similar to Ms. Janiak, Ms. Schmidt also reported that hands-on activities appeared effective with the EL learners with LD as well as with the native-English speakers that she taught. She reported instructional activities that allowed students to use, for example, whiteboards, pencils, vocabulary cards, and the computer in an effort to keep students' hands engaged in the learning activities.

Teachers thus reported challenges stemming from the persistence of students' below-grade level skills, student attitudes or behavior, and system-based constraints such as the teachers' inability to speak Spanish and the demands of large class sizes and the special education system on a teacher's time and energy, which made it difficult to individualize instruction. One teacher spoke about the challenge of the openness of some

teachers in the general education classroom to work with students who were still learning English.

All teachers pointed to the success of a degree of progress in students' reading skills. Many participants spoke of observing gains in their students' self-confidence, one noted improvements in students' attitude toward the reading program, and another spoke of students' enjoyment in doing some of the program activities. Two teachers identified techniques and practices they had found success with.

## SUMMARY

This chapter presented findings related to teachers' perceptions of the characteristics and factors that influenced the reading of their EL learners with LD; their notion of good reading instruction, given those characteristics and influential factors; and their perceived challenges and successes in teaching reading to this population of students.

# CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to learn about reading instruction being provided to middle-school English-language (EL) learners with learning disabilities (LD) who had recently (within 1 to 3 years) transitioned from bilingual (Spanish/English) education or bilingual special education to all-English instruction in their general and/or special education settings. Using qualitative methods, I sought to examine teachers' knowledge and beliefs about (a) the characteristics and factors that influenced the reading achievement of their English-language learners with LD, and (b) what constituted "good" reading instruction for EL learners with LD. I further sought to examine how teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs about their students' reading difficulties and about "good" reading instruction were reflected in their instructional practices. Finally, I hoped to learn about challenges and successes these educators had encountered in teaching reading to EL learners with LD.

In this chapter I present conclusions of this exploratory investigation conducted with five special education middle-school teachers in an urban school system. Conclusions are presented as working hypotheses (Erlandson et al., 1993) which represent my current understanding of the meaning I drew from the themes that emerged from the data, rather than reflecting any final conclusions. While there are many insights to be drawn from this glimpse into the knowledge, perceptions, and practices of five special education teachers of reading whose classrooms included English language learners with LD, three are presented here. The three Working Hypotheses are closely linked, and each could be considered to highlight one aspect of the multifaceted challenge of providing appropriate instruction to the growing population of EL learners in today's schools.

# Working Hypotheses

## Working Hypothesis 1. **Lacking preparation in addressing the needs of English-language learners, teachers addressed students' language needs incidentally and on a trial-and-error basis.**

### LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND PREPARATION IN ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHING EL LEARNERS

Little research exists on effective reading instruction with secondary EL learners with learning disabilities, and it cannot be assumed that what has been developed for and found effective with mainstream native English speakers will also be effective with EL learners (Harper & de Jong, 2004; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004; Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson, & Francis, 2005). Nonetheless, the available research on reading instruction for EL learners suggests that much of what is considered "good teaching" for native English speakers is also effective with EL learners in the mainstream (Fitzgerald, 1995, Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004; Vaughn, et al., 2003), with the inclusion of a greater emphasis on language development, vocabulary enrichment, and meaning making—all features deemed especially important for students who are English language learners (August & Hakuta, 1997; Echevarria & Graves, 1998; Goldenberg 1998; Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson, Francis, 2005). Echevarria and Goldenberg (1999) stressed that teachers of EL learners must (a) understand students' language needs, (b) plan to address identified needs in an explicit manner, (c) provide the instruction, and (d) assess students' comprehension.

According to the findings of Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, and Sapru (2003) from a large study of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students attending over 3000 schools across the U.S., 75% of district special education coordinators reported that their districts lacked sufficient numbers of teachers who were

qualified, based on their training, to serve LEP students with identified disabilities. As discussed in previous sections, like many other educators in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; Zeichner, 1993), none of the special education teachers in this study except Ms. Janiak had much, if any, preparation in instructional strategies designed to meet the needs of students who were English language learners. Ms. Schmidt, for example, acknowledged not knowing very much in this area, and so, in terms of her EL learners, stated that she did not really know what strategies or practices would be most effective. As a result, she indicated that she just addressed language issues as they "came up." Ms. Bautista declared knowing nothing, and Mr. LeBlanc felt sure he had had at least one class period on it, but could not remember. Despite the more than 130 hours of training in teaching second language learners, Ms. Janiak had been unsuccessful in obtaining ESL certification. Given that most participants were aware of their own limited knowledge about effective practices with EL learners, I inquired about collaborative efforts between ESL teachers and these special educators.

### ABSENCE OF ATTEMPTS TO SEEK INFORMATION FROM KNOWLEDGEABLE OTHERS

Findings from the first year of a two-year study of efforts to implement standards in four ethnically and linguistically diverse middle schools (Clair et al., 1998, 1999) support the need to bring teachers with different areas of specialized knowledge together in order to enhance the achievement of EL learners. Building relationships across departments and grade levels proved crucial in breaking down the barriers which had served to perpetuate a host of misunderstandings fueled by teachers' assumptions about the work each group of teachers did and the responsibilities each carried. I anticipated that teachers might have attempted to access knowledge about effective practices for EL learners by talking with teachers on their campus.

It appears that the compartmentalization common at the secondary level that Clair et al. (1998), Harklau (1999), and others described was also a feature in the schools these teachers worked in. None of the participants reported reaching out to the ESL teachers on their campuses regarding specific EL students or for more general information about effective strategies and practices with EL learners. Neither had ESL teachers communicated this information to teachers, though this is a recommended resource for teachers (Zehler, 1994). For example, when I asked Ms. Schmidt whether the ESL teacher had shared any information with staff about teaching EL learners, she answered, "No, and I haven't sought that out. I was thinking the other day that I should do that. And she would be the person to ask." Echoing the majority opinion of the nearly 280 teachers in Reeves' (2002, 2006) study of teacher attitudes toward including EL learners in mainstream classes indicating that they lacked sufficient time to manage the needs of these students, Ms. Schmidt lamented, "It's time. There just isn't time." Finding the time to include language development in content area instruction was the second greatest challenge named, after communication, in a survey of over 5000 teachers of EL learners (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005).

Mr. LeBlanc indicated that EL students at McKinney had been tested in both English and Spanish at the start of the school year, which he thought had been done to determine whether students should receive reading instruction in the ESL classroom or in the mainstream setting. He was not sure if results of those tests had been shared with teachers or even "if that correlates with what we're doing at all." He reported no exchange of ideas or collaboration between ESL teachers and special education teachers at McKinney. Ms. Janiak, the teacher with ESL training and experience as a provider of professional development for the district, reported that the administration at Sánchez had recently taken steps to familiarize the faculty with ESL strategies. She reported that an

overview of ESL methods had been presented at a faculty meeting, though, she noted, teachers preferred classroom visits with hands-on learning that facilitate application of new practices.

In light of teachers' declared minimal knowledge of effective practices to teach EL learners and the absence of collaborative efforts and policies at the campus level, I sought to ascertain teachers' perceptions of the language abilities demonstrated by their EL learners and the level of their awareness of language registers in the classroom.

### HAZY UNDERSTANDING OF LEVELS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND POTENTIAL INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

> "I really don't treat them any differently than the other students. That's why I'm answering these [questions] so wishy-washy. But I very rarely consider their language as any different from the other kids' [language]."
>
> Mr. LeBlanc

I asked teachers to talk about students' language in terms of both conversational and academic skills. Teachers varied in the degree of skill they perceived in their students' abilities to engage in conversation with their classroom peers. Ms. Janiak, the teacher with extensive ESL training, reported that her students had good conversational skills, but that they "have a hard time reading it," and understand more "when you give them oral." In response to how long she thought it takes for EL learners to acquire the academic language of textbooks, she answered, "It takes a while." Ms. Reinhart talked in greater detail about the differences in her EL learners' conversational skills in English as well as in their ability to handle academic material. She reported that her EL learners have adequate verbal skills for general conversations in English, but that they have more difficulty when slang is used, and more difficulty still in content areas such as science and social studies. The reasons for the difficulties, she asserted, were due to the nature of

these disciplines with challenging vocabulary, more difficult textbooks, and the fact that students "may not have the field of knowledge or the background to understand what is being said." She added that EL learners would have a hard time making sense of content if the teacher just lectured or had students read out of the textbook. Ms. Reinhart posited that EL learners required 3 to 4 years to develop proficiency in English sufficient to read the language of textbooks. However, she acknowledged that those with a learning disability that affected their language acquisition and vocabulary development might lag behind native-English speakers the length of their schooling, depending on the complexity of the subject matter.

Mr. LeBlanc first stated that students' conversational ability "depends on each student," although he conceded that his EL learners are in general probably not as comfortable holding a conversation in English as their native-English speaking peers. Generally, he considered them to be not too far behind the native speakers in terms of conversational skills. When the topic turned to academic matters, Mr. LeBlanc reported that he needed to simplify vocabulary and rephrase directions. He noted that he gives information in several different ways, using "easier words or different words," rather than just giving directions once. While high frequency vocabulary ("easier words") is a recommended practice (Echevarria & Graves, 1998; Zehler, 1994), teachers should exercise caution in using several different phrases to communicate the same intention because EL learners benefit from consistency (Echevarria & Graves, 1998). Similarly, Ms. Schmidt characterized the conversational skills of some of her EL learners as good, describing some students as "funny" and "outgoing," while others were quiet, with one student being so quiet, "He won't participate unless you just about force him to." In terms of handling academic material, she noted that several of the EL learners were in her lowest reading groups.

Ms. Bautista, in contrast to other teachers, described the English conversational skills of several of her EL learners as "functional," such that students are able to demonstrate only "survival skills" rather than to converse and hold a conversation. In terms of academic English, Ms. Bautista reported noticing a "direct correlation" between students' perceived inability to converse in English and his or her "comfort" with academic English. It was clear from her comments that Ms. Bautista pushed her EL students to speak English in her classroom, and that she attributed, in part, the reading gains that Vigail had made to her increased use of English in class.

It is interesting to note that Hopstock (2003) revealed in his report of services to LEP students nationwide that, in more than two-thirds of the districts sampled, with regard to LEP students who qualified for special education services, special education staff rather than Bilingual education and/or ESL personnel carried "primary responsibility for developing the program of instruction" (p. viii) for the LEP students with disabilities. Addressing the disability appears to supersede addressing the language needs of the student. This practice continues despite evidence from secondary mainstream classrooms (Reeves, 2002, 2006) that though teachers generally expressed a welcoming attitude towards teaching classes that included EL learners, they indicated that students should demonstrate a "minimum level" (p. 136) of proficiency in English, though this level was not defined. Indeed, Echevarria, Short, and Powers (2006) reported that, for a variety of reasons, EL learners too often are exited from ESL and other programs providing language support before they have acquired the level of proficiency in academic language to succeed on a par with their native English speaking peers.

Because students in participants' classrooms had exited ESL or bilingual programs, the teachers in this study may have assumed that the students no longer needed any type of support or instruction that differed in any significant manner from the

instruction planned for and provided to native English speakers. Ms. Bautista, for example, spoke about what she anticipates in regard to a student who had recently exited ESL support. Similar to the high school teachers in Reeves' (2002, 2006) study, she stated, "My expectation is that at some point he should have been proficient enough to handle the materials outside in a regular classroom." I asked how Ms. Bautista thought a recently exited ESL student might perform academically in the classroom. She replied, "Again, it correlates to that expectation of proficiency. That they can be able to handle the instructions that I give them, every which way that I give them—abbreviated … [or] long-winded." Ms. Bautista indicated that the decision to exit a student from ESL should be based on that proficiency; the reality is that students are often exited before this is achieved (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006).

Thus, with the possible exception of Ms. Bautista, most participants reported that their EL learners demonstrated conversational skills that appeared adequate to understand and maintain verbal interactions with their peers. In contrast, none reported students displayed adequate levels to handle academic material, even in the below grade-level materials teachers employed in their daily lessons. When asked, some teachers (LeBlanc, Schmidt) stated that they at least shared responsibility with the students and/or students' families to improve students' English abilities and for academic language development. However, none of the participants talked about language development as a feature of good reading instruction for EL learners, and none talked about how they worked to achieve this goal on a systematic basis in the classroom. Yet learning the language of textbooks and academic activities is critical knowledge EL learners need to achieve at the level of native English speakers (Collier, 1995) and to be successful in school learning (Short, 1999; Walqui, 2006).

Despite teachers' awareness of the gap between students' oral language proficiency and their proficiency with academic language, participants in this study seemed unaware of any possible implications of students' second language status for their instruction beyond very basic types of support. I looked at teachers' instruction for adjustments to their reading instruction that addressed the linguistic needs of students and asked each teacher to talk about accommodations or any differentiation they did for their EL learners.

## MINIMAL DIFFERENTIATION OR ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

There has been very little research investigating mainstream (i.e., non-language program) secondary teachers' beliefs and practices regarding modifying coursework for the increasing number of EL learners populating classrooms today; even less is known about special educators' views and practices.

In regard to modification of coursework for EL learners, Reeves (2002, 2006) reported that her nearly 280 mainstream participants were ambivalent about two common types of modifications, namely, simplifying coursework and decreasing the quantity of coursework, with approximately half approving these types of modifications and about half disapproving. However, the majority (80%) expressed general approval of the practice of allowing EL learners more time to complete the work, perhaps in recognition of the linguistic demands all-English coursework places on EL learners. As will be discussed, participants in this study engaged in a limited amount of all three types of modifications and other strategies, as well.

Additionally, Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll (2005) reported that teachers with more extensive preparation for teaching EL learners expressed more confidence in their ability to be effective in teaching these students. Without information on educating

EL learners in the reading and language arts classroom, teachers may act on "hunches" (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004, p. 2). Although unaware of the second language learning process and associated practices that would support students' language development, some of the participants had developed ideas about specific areas in which the EL learners required more support and/or additional development compared to native English speakers. For example, though Ms. Bautista initially stated she did not modify instruction for EL learners, toward the end of the study she indicated that instruction for EL learners should proceed more slowly and emphasize spelling and vocabulary to a greater degree than what was necessary for native speakers of English. In addition, she spoke of realizing that the process of translating took time and effort, and therefore, she gave José more wait time to allow him to formulate answers (Echevarria & Graves, 1998). She also gave students who were unable to keep pace "a break" on some assignments, regardless of language characteristics.

Mr. LeBlanc stated that he needed to use "more basic language" with EL learners and acknowledged that they probably needed to be exposed to lots of language that was "at their levels in English." This practice implies comprehensible input for second language learners, which has long been acknowledged as a feature of effective instruction for these students (Dutro & Moran, as cited in Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005; Lucas, 1993; Short, 1999). Furthermore, though unable to verify students' comprehension of Spanish text, Mr. LeBlanc also allowed selected students to read books in Spanish as long as they could produce the required three questions and answers at the end of each chapter or section of text. He noted that he had learned that "if English isn't your primary language, it knocks you down a few levels in simple comprehension of what's expected of you." His way of managing this was to "approach them as if they were LD kids on a lower level." He explained,

> Let's say I have a kid who speaks English and he's reading on a 3rd grade level. And I have a kid who's *learning* to speak English and reading on a 5th grade level—obviously higher. I'll still I teach them the same way because what I want them to do … I may not necessarily convey it clearly enough. So I want the … message that I send to be simple enough for them to understand. And … in that respect … it seems that they're about on the same learning level to me.

This approach to modifying instruction in which higher-skilled EL learners are taught "as if they're about on the same learning level" as lower-skilled native English speakers is problematic in that students may not be provided cognitively challenging instruction (Chamot, 1993; Gersten & Jiménez, 1994; Walqui, 2006). It appears that it is still the case that students' English abilities are limiting their exposure to challenging work, concepts, and instruction that would develop higher-order thinking skills, which has far-reaching effects on their schooling outcomes (Lucas, 1993; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Ms. Schmidt had discovered out of desperation one day the strategy of pairing two Spanish-speaking students together, one with higher reading skills. In reflecting how well that had worked, she was considering pairing other students, and recognized that the language ability of potential partners was one factor she should consider in her pairing decisions. Chamot (1993), Hamayan and Perlman (1990), Zehler (1994) and many others note that allowing EL learners to work with peers is an effective means of increasing student engagement in the lesson. Other strategies Ms. Schmidt felt were effective with EL learners were hands-on activities that she did with all students. The nature and extent of specific language support she provided to English learners consisted of clarifying differences between the sound-symbol systems of Spanish and English, knowledge she had gleaned in a recent summer language course. These comprised the basic steps that most teachers took to make content or assignments more accessible to EL learners, which, although representing a measure of appropriate instructional practices, are probably inadequate to achieve the desired outcome of moving EL learners forward.

It must be noted that, in addition to teachers' self-disclosed lack of knowledge of appropriate, effective instructional practices for EL learners, at least one other reason for the minimal amount of modifications was alluded to. Ms. Bautista appeared to equate or confound differentiation of instruction with watering down instruction, which has negative implications for students' success (MacGillivray & Rueda, 2003). She seemed to view the act of considering students' language background not as an instructive process one should engage in with the goal of making instruction more effective and more meaningful for EL learners, but rather as an action that would in reality result in less positive outcomes for the students rather than more positive. She indicated that, in light of students' status as second language learners, the teacher would put "obstacles." She related her thinking as follows: 'Oh, they're doing this because they're ELLs.' Or, 'They're doing this because of, whatever.'" She commented, "If I knew all of these other things, that's just going to be a way … to make allowances, for making excuses." Thus, Ms. Bautista implied that by not considering students' linguistic history, she avoided lowering her expectations for EL learners, with the result that everybody was "equal in … the treatment." She did not appear to consider that, rather than lowering expectations for her EL learners, adapting instruction effectively for students would require more from her, not less from them.

Ms. Janiak, by virtue of the Project Read program she utilized to teach reading, employed several strategies that have been found to be effective with EL learners. When asked about modifying her instruction to meet the needs of EL learners with learning disabilities, Ms. Janiak referred to specific strategies in the Project Read curriculum, which was also the district's curriculum for students with dyslexia. She talked about employing hands-on activities using concrete items (e.g., cups) as visual aids (Gersten, Baker, & Marks, 1998; Waxman & Téllez, K., 2002) to teach more abstract concepts

(e.g., sorting and coding facts) (Hamayan & Perlman, 1990; Short, 1999), utilizing simple terms when introducing new concepts to make them easier for students to understand and learn and pairing hand motions with skill concepts (Hamayan & Perlman, 1990; Short, 1999) such as *unlocking key facts*, and modeling desired products (Walqui, 2006), to name a few features of the program.

Ms. Janiak thus perceived that the methods advocated in Project Read represented a modified curriculum appropriate for her all of the students she taught reading. It should be recalled that Ms. Janiak had reported doing a small pilot study with a colleague at Sánchez to evaluate whether Project Read was effective with ESL students in general education, and the students had made gains with the curriculum. The literature supports Ms. Janiak's belief that Project Read includes many features that are effective with EL learners; however, the program, as delivered, did not emphasize language development and vocabulary learning, two key components of effective instruction for EL learners (Chamot, 1993; Short, 1999; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005). Leung and Franson (as cited in Harper and de Jong, 2004) posit that although the use of realia, graphics, and modified teacher talk can make complex ideas and information more accessible to EL learners, there is little evidence that such comprehension by itself leads to gains in ability to use English to engage in academic tasks. As a result, gains in content knowledge may be achieved, but a corresponding improvement in language abilities has probably not occurred.

The notion of differentiating instruction or individualizing for students as an element of good reading instruction was alluded to in Ms. Janiak's advice to a hypothetical new teacher to have the students who continued to struggle with decoding work on a "remediation program" while the other students worked on the regular warm up. This was a practice that she regularly engaged in, as I frequently observed three or

four students working on the computer during the opening minutes of class. In Ms. Janiak's class, it should be noted, the warm-up was completed within the first 5-10 minutes of class, and therefore, the differentiated activity she identified was of relatively brief duration. Thus, Ms. Janiak spoke of differentiating to address the learning disability, but did not mention differentiating to address EL learners' language needs.

Similar to Shanahan's (2001) study of mainstream high school teachers, participants in this study were largely unaware that EL learners might have needs that differed from those of native English-speaking students or needs that, while similar for both groups, differed in the intensity of need. Teachers did not appear to consider that EL learners might need something different in the way of instruction or teaching practices—not only to meet their specific needs but also to benefit to the same extent as the native-English speaking students did from reading instruction. In looking for possible explanations, I was struck by degree of influence on instruction of the programs teachers and schools had adopted and also of participants' own teacher training programs.

## Working Hypothesis 2. **Instruction was shaped by the particular reading program in use and mediated by participants' own teacher credential program.**

### INFLUENCE OF READING PROGRAM

In observing teachers' classroom instruction and in listening to teachers weave references to their reading program into discussions of their instruction, it was evident that the program teachers implemented to teach reading had a strong and definitive influence on their instruction. The content, methods, and practices they utilized in their classrooms all clearly reflected those advocated by the commercially available program they relied on for instruction, to the near exclusion of other components of reading instruction recommended in the research literature. The programs also influenced how

teachers defined "good" reading instruction for their EL learners with LD, as what they taught matched up with what they included in their descriptions of "good" instruction.

Most of the research involving commercially-packaged programs to-date has focused on achievement outcomes for students, and their effect on teachers' instruction is mentioned only in terms of fidelity of implementation and whether the latter correlated with student outcomes (e.g., Westphal & Tuss, 2002). Datnow and Castellano (2001) investigated a different facet of teacher implementation; they studied how teacher beliefs and experiences related to their adaptations of Success for All (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, as cited in Datnow & Castellano, 2001) and influenced their implementation of the program. These researchers reported that nearly all teachers in their sample modified the program, primarily by spending more time in particular activities than the program manual indicated. Other adaptations included deleting activities, often due to time constraints, or substituting activities teachers perceived more appropriate for their students.

Such adaptations were not observed in this study. The powerful influence of the program on participants' instruction was apparent with the three teachers implementing Corrective Reading (CR) as well as the teacher implementing Project Read. In regard to the CR teachers, for example, instruction focused primarily on the explicit and systematic teaching of decoding, with small amounts of time spent on fluency, spelling, and answering very low-level, literal comprehension questions. Indeed, Mr. LeBlanc described the program as "working, basically, phonetically through the book," and Ms. Bautista characterized the program as "basically just decoding and fluency." The instruction of the CR teachers included all of the elements emphasized in the program such as tightly sequenced decoding lessons, practice in oral reading to build fluency, and

practice and application of skills in student workbooks (McGraw-Hill, Corrective Reading, p. 1-2).

Ms. Janiak's content, methods, and practices revealed a similarly strong alignment with the curriculum and methods of Project Read. Her instruction included a warm-up that reinforced the sound-symbol patterns and syllable types of English; explicit instruction in the structure of expository text and how to identify the main ideas and supporting details; and explicit teaching of the structure of narrative text and how to identify story grammar elements. This instruction was accompanied by hand motions, the use of concrete examples, visuals, realia, and graphics to make abstract concepts more comprehensible, and activities that engaged students in hands-on activities. These are all elements of Project Read. Ms. Janiak did not adhere to her program as closely as the CR teachers in that she went beyond Project Read in the use of a novel that students read while they listened to a taped reading. The novel prompted discussions about historic world events as well as about new vocabulary terms in the story.

Elements or components that were not an explicit, integral part of teachers' adopted programs were de-emphasized, sporadically addressed, or virtually omitted in classroom instruction. For example, instruction targeting EL learners' need for language development was neither a feature of CR nor Project Read; consequently, this area was only addressed incidentally. Although CR teachers included a fluency-building activity each day, per the CR program, Ms. Janiak did not; Project Read focuses much more on comprehension, and thus, fluency was not taught in an explicit, systematic manner in her classroom, nor did she speak about students' fluency as a need. Once described as "the neglected reading goal" (Allington, 1983), fluency received minimal attention in Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Janiak's rooms. Finally, the multisensory practices that Ms. Janiak and Ms. Schmidt emphasized as features of good instruction and that are generally accepted

as beneficial for students with learning disabilities (e.g., Oakland, Black, Stanford, Nussbaum, & Balise, 1998**;** O'Dea, 1998) were largely absent from the CR teachers' classrooms, although CR can be characterized as interactive due to the high levels of student response incorporated in the lessons.

This de-emphasis of components in participants' instruction was apparent even when teachers perceived that students needed development in the neglected skill areas. For example, Mr. LeBlanc had reported that the difficulties students had experienced with his project-based curriculum the year before the study were due more to problems with comprehension than to decoding deficits. Similarly, Ms. Bautista had remarked on students' poor comprehension. Yet, neither teacher modified the content of the instructional program they were following to include a greater emphasis on developing students' reading comprehension. The problem with restricting comprehension instruction to the kind of text-based, literal questions that tend to accompany the 2nd and 3rd grade materials used for decoding instruction is that English language learners should also be asked "challenging questions and provide[d] learning tasks that require higher order thinking skills" (Chamot, 1993, p. 12; Hoover & Patton, 2005). The level of comprehension instruction that occurred in the CR program would not be worrisome if students received critical comprehension instruction elsewhere, such as in their language arts class. Although I did not observe Ms. Bautista's language arts class, and thus, cannot speak about comprehension instruction she may have provided in that setting, I did observe Mr. LeBlanc's. It was evident from my observations and his own description that reading, including reading comprehension, was not a focus in language arts because Mr. LeBlanc was targeting writing skills the year the study took place.

Another example where teachers identified a need for instruction but did not consistently address it in their teaching in a systematic, planned manner was in the area of

vocabulary enrichment. While virtually all teachers mentioned vocabulary as a weak area for their EL learners, vocabulary development was addressed consistently, explicitly, and systematically only by Ms. Schmidt. Ms. Schmidt selected about a dozen words from the week's reading passage, conducted a pretest to ascertain the words most students had hazy or incorrect understandings of, had students look them up in children's dictionaries, and then tested the complete set of words at the end of the week. The CR teachers addressed vocabulary as it came up in the lesson and a need became evident, while Ms. Janiak's vocabulary instruction appeared to be incidental until the novel unit, at which time vocabulary words were included on the story guide sheets that accompanied each chapter.

Thus, participants in this study relied heavily on the commercial program they had adopted for their curriculum, methods, and instructional practices. Another influence on their instruction was their teacher preparation program and prior experiences.

### INFLUENCE OF PARTICIPANTS' OWN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM AND EXPERIENCES

The influence of participants' teacher preparation program was apparent in how teachers thought about appropriate instruction for their students and the ways in which they prepared and delivered instruction, consistent with the findings of Rueda and García's (1996) in their investigation of literacy practices of special education, credentialed bilingual and bilingual waivered teachers. Thus, teacher education programs do have an impact on teachers' practices. Indeed, many teacher educators have written about the positive outcomes of the various programs they have established to increase pre-service teachers' preparedness and skills for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (e.g., Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005; Cooper, 1992; Mora & Grisham, 2001; Youngs, 1999). This implies a measure of responsibility on

teacher educators to "get it right," because the converse is also likely to occur. That is, knowledge and skills that are absent or nearly invisible in teacher education programs are likely to be missing or downplayed in teachers' thinking about instruction and in their teaching, as was found in this study.

For example, Ms. Bautista's first five years in the field of education had been in a Title 1 program on her native island. Her earliest training, thus, had been in teaching reading not only or even primarily to students with identified learning disabilities, but rather to any student experiencing difficulty in learning to read. According to Section 101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.), the purpose of the Title 1 program is to ensure children have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and attain academic proficiency by "meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance" (paragraph 2 under Statement of Purpose). Thus, the program focuses on providing quality instruction to address the educational need of students of varied backgrounds whose reading difficulties are likely influenced by multiple factors.

The focus of Title 1, it could be posited, is on remediating the presenting reading difficulties, with a de-emphasis on examining characteristics of the students and possible contributing or mediating factors. I perceived this same orientation in Ms. Bautista in her approach to her current teaching. For example, when I asked her what she knew about reading instruction for EL learners, she indicated that she knew nothing and, after explaining why knowing nothing is sometimes a good thing, she shared her thinking about it as follows. "Well. This is the way it is. We need to learn to read. This is the structure of learning how to read. Let's get on board. Not, get derailed with all of this

ELLs, and LDs, and you know." She then glossed over possible mediating factors in students' difficulties in her concluding statement, "Whatever it is that their problems are, it has all allowed them to be at this level together. Okay, so we're going to cover it." She later reiterated this orientation in her comment, "You have these huge gaps of … skills that you have not [mastered], that you've missed for some reason. Whatever [those reasons] are, we're not going to dwell on it." She added, "We're going to move on." Such an approach that focuses on the presenting reading skills and strengths rather than on labeling students has its supporters. Hallahan and Kauffman (as cited in Sabornie, Evans, & Cullinan, 2006), for example, proposed a non-categorical or cross-categorical approach to teaching students with high-incidence disabilities (i.e., emotional-behavioral disabilities, learning disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities) whose behavioral and academic characteristics, they argued, were more similar than different. However, we must not become generalists to the extent that we disregard student attributes such as second language learner status and characteristics of the LD which should be elements that both inform and are addressed in teachers' instruction. The approach appropriate for students without disabilities differs from the needs of students with LD. Furthermore, in ignoring students' language characteristics and background, there is the real danger of misinterpreting as reading disabilities the reading difficulties commonly manifested in English by EL learners that are characteristic of the second language acquisition process. In ignoring students' background, the cultural experiences and linguistic knowledge EL learners possess in their native language are untapped. This practice denies EL learners the opportunity to demonstrate skills and areas of expertise, and implicitly devalues their unique or collective experiences that are not shared by their monolingual peers but which could greatly enrich classroom discussions.

Ms. Janiak attributed her failure to pass the ESL certification exam, despite more than 130 hours of in-service training in ESL methods, to her thinking as a special education teacher in approaching the exam. She related that though there are some similarities in ESL methods and special education methods, the thinking is different; in relying on her preparation to teach students with LD, she had not succeeded on the ESL certification exam. Despite this experience and the unfavorable outcomes for her goal of ESL certification, Ms. Janiak talked about professional development as a remedy for the training needs regarding distinguishing learning disabilities in EL learners that she saw on her campus. One could posit that her complementary roles as both a consumer and producer of professional development in the district made her more open to the benefits of professional development. None of the other teachers spoke of a need for professional development for themselves or other teachers at their schools.

Ms. Reinhart, prepared and certified to teach English, held a teaching endorsement in LD. She was the only teacher to talk about experiencing a degree of resistance initially to the CR program. She reported feeling resistant due to concerns that CR would restrict her ability to be creative in her classroom instruction. Thus, the strictly sequenced and scripted lessons of CR appeared to engender a level of dissonance in Ms. Reinhart that could be explained, at least in part, by her pre-service teacher preparation program which presumably centered on a rich, creative language arts curriculum. Mr. LeBlanc had obtained alternative certification in special education after working as an illustrator for eight years. One might posit that he graduated from the alternative program perhaps less steeped in special education history and practices than do graduates of 4-year certification programs; this, coupled with his being a new teacher, probably contributed to his "assuming far too much" about students' skill levels. Similarly, his training and background in the creative arts may have influenced his language arts

curriculum his first year of teaching, in which nearly all lessons had been presented in the context of working on a host of different projects.

Ms. Schmidt's pre-service training and certification was in special education; all but 4 of her 16 years' teaching experience had been with young children with speech and language delays. Trained in special education methods, she had devised her own reading curriculum of three rotating groups addressing decoding, comprehension, and spelling, because, as she noted, "all of the objectives … are … pretty similar, anyway, for everybody," thus implying a reliance on students' IEP goals and objectives to guide her instruction, similar to the practice Ms. Reinhart had described using prior to her adoption of Corrective Reading.

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT INSTRUCTION AND PRACTICES

### The Benefits of a Packaged Program for Special Educators

It must also be noted here that with the adoption of a packaged reading program (CR), several time-consuming tasks that typically make up a significant portion of the demands on teachers' time were eliminated. The Corrective Reading program provides teacher books and guides containing sequences of scripted lessons. Accompanying materials for students, such as books containing lessons, brief passages, and exercises, as well as workbooks for students to practice and apply the key skills taught in the lessons, are included, as well. With CR in place, not only was the time commitment required for daily lesson planning significantly reduced (and even, in the minds of some, eliminated), but the demands on teachers' time of a whole host of tasks that go along with drawing up the day's lesson (e.g., decision making related to scope and sequence; conceptualizing and designing appropriate learning activities, regular assignments, and meaningful

assessment; locating and gathering materials to facilitate engagement and learning, etc.) were reduced or eliminated, as well.

In contrast to the teachers in Rueda and García's (1996) study, participants in this study did not imply that their efforts to "experiment with new practices" (p. 325) had been hampered by school or program constraints. All teachers in this study using a commercially available program for reading instruction expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the programs. There was a sense among the participants in this study that before CR, providing reading instruction to their students with LD had posed a daily challenge. Several teachers had remarked on the previous lack of a curriculum and materials in place that they could draw on in their endeavor to improve the reading abilities of students reading significantly below grade level. Ms. Bautista, for example, described her instruction before CR as a "scrounge and grab," with her scrambling to find materials students could read and that were in plentiful supply so that each student could have a copy. She indicated she often had used worksheets in her instruction, and students would "bubble in," although she acknowledged that it was difficult to teach reading through worksheets. Ms. Bautista said of her reading instruction, "It was a catch-as-catch-can type of thing.… There was no curriculum."

Ms. Reinhart, the department chair at Sánchez, smiled quietly when I asked about the curriculum in place for students with LD before the adoption of the CR program. She explained that there had been no curriculum, and that it was the practice of special education teachers to refer to students' IEPs to identity goals and objectives to guide instruction, and teachers would also use selected materials from Project Read. She acknowledged that teachers "used a lot of pulling from here and there." She, like Ms. Bautista, shared her difficulty in finding engaging reading materials written at a level that students could successfully read. Because her students read at the 1st and 2nd grade level,

this was an especially challenging endeavor. Ms. Schmidt, too, talked about looking to students' objectives to guide her curriculum, and echoed the sentiments of several participants when she stated, "But, I feel like I'm swimming part of the time because … no direction, and no real curriculum or no—nothing that's been recommended to us, that I know about." Finally, Mr. LeBlanc's enthusiasm and satisfaction with his own project-based curriculum that he had implemented the year prior to the study appeared to have waned in the face of the difficulties students encountered in working on the projects and in producing work of acceptable quality. He noted that with the CR program, he at least had something to fall back on when his instruction wasn't working.

It is also important to emphasize that teachers' adoption and implementation of packaged programs was not done lightly and without regard for efficacy in improving reading outcomes. Ms. Bautista and Ms. Janiak both spoke about research that had been conducted with their programs (CR and Project Read, respectively), and Ms. Janiak reported conducting action research to evaluate Project Read specifically with EL learners in the general education program at her school. Representatives of the Corrective Reading program, through district channels, had made a presentation to teachers highlighting the positive outcomes attained in classrooms implementing CR. Teachers' confidence in the programs thus appeared to derive from research demonstrating program efficacy as well as from the content and approach of the programs, which were aligned with students' needs they had identified. Specifically, teachers had spoken of the need for direct instruction methods in teaching reading, and both programs met this requirement. Ms. Reinhart and Ms. Bautista had spoken at length of their students' need to master decoding; the CR program, with its focus on this component skill of reading, addressed this need. Ms. Janiak, whose students had higher decoding skills, emphasized the

importance of comprehension instruction for her students; the comprehension strand of the Project Read curriculum met this need.

Thus, with the adoption of packaged programs, not only had the "scrounge and grab" conditions that Ms. Bautista referred to—the chronic quest for high interest, low readability materials that both she and Ms. Reinhart spoke of, the sense of "having to pull out something out of the [thin air]"—been dispensed with, but teachers also expressed confidence that the chosen program would teach the skills that their students needed and via methods that they supported. For Ms. Bautista, Mr. LeBlanc, and Ms. Reinhart, the CR program appeared more likely to produce the desired level of improvement than their previous reading instruction.

The preceding discussion suggests at least two problems. The first is that most of these teachers, though aware of the importance of improving students' skills in decoding, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, did not have a clear understanding of how to go about achieving these important goals. Of the five participants, only Ms. Janiak had extensive preparation in teaching reading and had many years of experience teaching reading; the minimal preparation to teach reading the other teachers reported and their relative inexperience in teaching reading was evident in their instruction. Only Ms. Janiak, for example, spoke in any detail of how she went about teaching summarizing, outlining, and other higher order comprehension skills in a structured, systematic manner; only she spoke of preparing students to be successful in their general education classes, of reading the world, not just the text in front of them. Only Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Bautista spoke about holding students accountable for spelling (and to their credit, targeted spelling words were not selected randomly, but rather chosen for study if students had difficulty with them in the reading materials). No one talked about using systematic progress monitoring to inform their teaching; indeed, Mr. LeBlanc implied

that assessing progress would not serve a useful purpose, since results would not altar the curriculum.

Some might conclude from the Teacher Portraits in Chapter IV that little teaching and little reading actually occurred in these reading and language arts classrooms. Teachers facilitated instruction on the computer, through scripted lessons, or provided books on tape to provide a literacy experience; little teaching of reading skills was observed or reported in specific detail. With a stronger background in teaching reading to older students, Ms. Schmidt, who had the freedom to create her own curriculum, might have designed and incorporated more robust interventions to teach comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. Teachers with stronger preparation to teach reading might have been more reflective of their teaching and more critical of program representatives' claims that the program can address all the skills students needed. Well-prepared reading teachers might have been better able to respond to the exhortation of some in the field (e.g., Hibbert & Iannacci, 2005) to be critical consumers of marketed solutions, to question claims (implied or explicit) of effectiveness with *all* students, and to move beyond the packaged program to adapt reading instruction to be more effective with their students. These teachers lacked the reading background necessary to view their programs with a critical lens and supplement the packaged curricula with instruction that addressed the missing strands.

The second problem relates to the lack of a curriculum for special education teachers to teach reading to students with LD. Special education has evolved over the years since the inauguration of P.L. 94-142 from the ideal of highly individualized instruction targeting specific goals for each student (Zigmond, 2001) to a format, at the secondary level, that more closely resembles general education classes in that large numbers of students with disabilities rotate from resource room to resource room or to

and from a mix of general education and resource room classes. Research suggests that little individualization occurs in the resource room, and that instruction is often delivered with a whole-class format (e.g., Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, & Fischer, 2000). Districts often provide general education teachers with a curriculum to guide their instruction and make available the books and materials needed to teach that curriculum.

Texas has gone beyond this in their development of Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs) for each content area that delineate scope and sequence of skills and instruction per grading period, and which identify and provide materials to use, some of them downloadable from the district website. Parallel direction and support for special educators teaching students reading significantly below grade level and most in need of systematic instruction in reading is lacking. Special educators seeking materials that students can read and that are of interest may be told by school administrators to follow the same grade-level IPGs as general educators, use the same grade-level materials, and to "have high expectations" for students. While holding high expectations for students is critical, it does not provide specific information or support to teachers on how to get an eighth grader reading at the 2nd grade up to grade level using those grade-level materials. Teachers may feel defeated in the face of such platitudes which ignore and undermine the mandate of special education, which is to provide a free and appropriate individualized education that addresses students' specific, individual educational needs.

**Minimal Lesson Planning**

A brief discussion of lesson planning is warranted. The three teachers implementing the CR curriculum to teach reading appeared to take the position that because of the direct instruction methods and the sequenced, structured nature of the program, the need to engage in lesson planning was reduced or even eliminated. None of the CR teachers appeared to see much need to think about their instruction or their

students before teaching a lesson; it could be that this is another area where the program shaped teachers' practices. Perhaps they saw such activities as not particularly fruitful, given the scripted, sequenced nature of the program. The two teachers who did not implement CR engaged in some lesson planning; indeed, it appeared from the form on which Ms. Janiak's lesson plans were written that Sánchez required teachers to hand in a copy of lesson plans.

Though little research exists that investigates the lesson planning practices of special education teachers (Maroney & Searcy, 1996; Searcy & Maroney, 1996), the planning practices and written plans shared by participants appeared consistent with the findings of Searcy and Mahoney (1996). Searcy and Maroney (1996) found that the majority of the 207 special educators in Iowa surveyed reported that they did not write out plans for each lesson, and in those lessons they did put on paper, they typically addressed the three components of independent practice, materials required, and a means to evaluate learning objectives. The teachers surveyed reported favoring "conscious planning" of lesson plan components (p. 185) over written plans. Consistent with the implications of Searcy and Maroney's findings, Ms. Janiak and Ms. Schmidt's discussion of lesson planning was much richer and more detailed than their written plans. Nonetheless, nowhere in their discussions nor in the plans they provided to me was students' language development addressed.

One might posit that by omitting or streamlining the process of lesson planning, these teachers were missing an opportunity to reflect on the characteristics and needs of their students, to examine their curricula with a critical eye, and to consider whether adjustments might be called for. Costa and Garmston (as cited in Met, 1998) have proposed that good teaching relies on good planning. Echevarria and colleagues (1998; 1999) indicated that teachers' thoughtful planning and reflection are important to the

effectiveness of lessons with EL learners. Research literature indicates that instruction for English-language learners must include language objectives as well as content objectives (Burkart & Sheppard, n.d.; Echevarria & Graves, 1998; Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Met, 1998; Short, 1999); indeed, Met (1998) posited that teachers should "view every content lesson as a language lesson" (p. 161).

As implied in some of the comments of teachers in the present study, they, like many mainstream secondary teachers, did not think of themselves as language teachers (Harper & de Jong, 2004). Harper and de Jong's (2004) article examining four misconceptions about teaching English-language learners reported that non-ESL content area teachers had trouble examining their content for linguistic demands and developing language objectives. Beyond identifying key vocabulary, the teachers in the vignette they described were unable to identify the language demands of their instruction. The language of instruction was "invisible" (Diaz-Rico and Weed, as cited in Harper & de Jong, 2004) to the teachers. However, simply holding high expectations and exposing students to English via interaction with native-English speaking peers is not sufficient to promote students' learning of academic English to the levels required for success (Harper & de Jong, 2004).

Thus, lesson planning was generally minimal among the teachers in the present study. The planning that did occur focused strictly on the LD characteristics of students, and revealed the strong influence of their teacher preparation programs and of their experiences. However, teachers were not completely unaware of the possibility that EL learners might have unique needs and characteristics that impacted their reading abilities: they were able to articulate several ways in which students' status as second language learners influenced their reading. However, they did not perceive that teaching reading to second language learners might necessitate thoughtful consideration and planning to

make the curriculum more accessible, comprehensible, or meaningful for students coming from a different cultural background.

## Working Hypothesis 3: **Teachers Demonstrated a One-Size-Fits-All Orientation to Their Reading Instruction.**

Teachers appeared resistant to the notion that they should consider the unique needs of EL learners. There seemed to be a sense of uncertainty or ambivalence about just what teachers' responsibilities were toward EL learners.

### AMBIVALENCE ABOUT RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARD EL LEARNERS

Ms. Bautista reflected an element of ambivalence about the extent and nature of her responsibilities toward EL learners in her discussion of the CR program and her instruction. She stated, "So, it's like…Everybody's equal in the … treatment, I mean in … the cure." She elaborated, "An ESL program is separate from all the other programs," and asserted that she was "satisfied with the *reading* [original emphasis] program in place for our special ed students," and with "what we're doing to address their needs … their *reading* [original emphasis] needs." Thus, Ms. Bautista clarified that the reading class is not an ESL program, and that the reading needs of EL learners are addressed satisfactorily with the CR program. The implication is that the reading class is not the place to address any need unique to EL learners; ESL programs have that responsibility. This is consistent with research (Harper & de Jong, 2004) that content teachers do not view themselves as language teachers. However, for EL learners who are mainstreamed in all-English classrooms, every teacher needs to consider language development (Met, 1998; Short, 1999).

Mr. LeBlanc voiced similar ambivalence about his responsibilities towards EL learners the most clearly. He asked, "Is this something we need to worry about? Along

with [everything else?]" Referring to the "double demands" of teaching EL learners (Gersten, as cited in Waxman & Téllez, 2002), he wondered aloud what his responsibilities were toward "special groups" of students such as EL learners, querying, "Is it my job to have them learn English? [Or] is it my job to teach them what everybody else is teaching them?" The perhaps unintended message here is that other content teachers were teaching their subject matter to classes enrolling EL learners without consideration of how to address language and vocabulary development needs and how to make content more accessible and more meaningful for second language learners.

Ms. Janiak, in contrast, revealed no uncertainties about her responsibilities toward the EL learners in her class in her assertion that they were "the same responsibilities that I have for every other kid in my classroom." That responsibility emphasized maintaining high expectations for all students, as evident in her clarifying statement, "I'm going to hold the carrot up high." Thus, in holding high expectations for all students, she satisfied her responsibilities toward EL learners, as she saw them. As with other participants, Ms. Janiak implied that EL learners, not she as the teacher, were expected to take whatever measures were necessary to meet her expectations.

What is missing in Ms. Janiak's statement and the statements of the other participants is any reference to steps they should take to develop and accelerate the learning of vocabulary and of other language abilities of their EL learners with LD. As with the other teachers, Ms. Janiak implied that students, not she as the teacher, needed to work harder and do what was necessary to bridge any barriers to their own academic success. Teachers' ambivalence about taking responsibility for the reading achievement of their EL learners' with LD was further evident in how they spoke about students' reading difficulties. Teachers spoke about parents who did not require reading in English, who did not support (and perhaps resisted) the school's efforts to have students learn

English, and parents who did not support students' education in the expected ways such as looking through schoolwork and contacting teachers. Teachers attributed poor progress in reading to students who did not take responsibility for studying and reviewing lessons, who spoke Spanish at every opportunity, and who resisted the instruction teachers worked hard to deliver. Teachers identified whole language instruction, with its lack of direct instruction methods, as an additional culprit in students' reading difficulties. Once or twice a teacher noted that she or he could or should do something different from their current practices to increase student learning, but acknowledgement of the role and responsibility teachers carried in improving students' reading achievement seldom occurred. The teachers in this study did not appear to view themselves as powerful agents in the literacy attainment of their students. Teachers' beliefs about their self-efficacy, as discussed in Chapter I, influence the effort they are willing to expend and their perseverance in the face of difficulties.

### NEEDS OF EL LEARNERS WITH LD FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT SUBSUMED UNDER THEIR NEEDS AS STUDENTS WITH LD

As noted earlier, it was frequently difficult for me to discern the ways in which instruction for EL learners differed from the instruction provided to native-English speakers in their classes. Similar to Shanahan's (2001) findings in his study of mainstream secondary teachers of EL learners in general education classrooms, with a few exceptions (e.g., Ms. Schmidt clarifying differences between the Spanish and English sound-symbol system), an observer would not be able to determine which students were EL learners and which were native English speakers from the teachers' actions. Similar to Shanahan's (2001) experience, special educators in this study did not consider in their planning or instructional delivery the specific needs of EL learners (e.g., language development, vocabulary enrichment, and contextualizing instruction to improve

comprehension) that are more urgent for them as students coming from culturally and linguistically diverse households.

Teachers instead emphasized those needs that were common across students. For example, when I asked Ms. Schmidt to talk about any successes she might have experienced in teaching English-language learners, she responded with a laugh and then acknowledged, "I guess I've never really thought about it too much before. Because I wasn't … *focusing* on the *differences*." Similar to Shanahan's (2001) mainstream teachers, participants in this study expressed no great concerns regarding the integration of EL learners in their classes because they viewed the needs of EL learners as largely the same as those of mainstream students. For example, Mr. LeBlanc stated that though his EL learners required more repetition and reinforcement than the CR program provided for, this was true for native English speakers as well. He also spoke about finding he needed to break instruction down into smaller increments than what he had expected, but again, this applied to all students in his classes. Ms. Schmidt also noted that much of what she described in terms of students' difficulties in reading and in her instruction applied to both EL learners and native English speaking students. It was very difficult for teachers to talk about unique needs or characteristics of the English-language learners.

Shanahan (2001) reported that his mainstream teachers tended to "conceptually envelope" (p. 188) their EL learners into the larger population of mainstream students, resulting in teachers' "reduction of concerns" (p. 188) regarding what these students needed in the way of planning, instruction, and assessment. The streamlining of concerns noted in Shanahan's study ultimately lead to the "invisibility" of EL learners in the mainstream. I would argue that the special educators in this study showed a similar tendency to reduce the complexity of factors related to their EL learners. In talking about the characteristics and factors that influenced the below-grade level reading abilities of

their EL learners, for example, teachers emphasized elements related to the learning disability, such as inconsistencies or gaps in skills, deficits in decoding, spelling, comprehension, and fluency, and inappropriate instruction in students' elementary years. Teachers' focus was thus completely on remediating the skill deficits that EL learners and native-English speakers alike exhibited. The end result of teachers' "reduction of concerns" is a failure to provide EL learners with the kind of language-rich instruction that would move them forward in their acquisition of academic English, and thus endangers EL learners' future academic progress.

Shanahan (2001) found that some of his mainstream participants were not sure who their EL learners were. This was not the case with these special educators; every teacher had a very good idea as to which students were EL learners and/or spoke Spanish as the primary language at home. However—perhaps evidence of participants in the present study's "reduction of concerns"—teachers seemed unaware of the educational history of their EL learners with LD in terms of programming. Only Ms. Schmidt referenced students' previous placement in noting that she taught students who had been in bilingual special education units. She mentioned this in the context of sharing that her EL learners who had been in a bilingual special education program seemed to be having the most difficulty in improving their reading. Interestingly, Ms. Schmidt had in the past sent an EL learner with LD back to the ESL teacher on her campus for reading instruction because she had felt unable to teach him, given the level of his English skills. This experience, coupled with her knowledge that students had been in bilingual special education, may in part explain why Ms. Schmidt was curious about the kind of instruction her EL learners had received in the bilingual classroom before coming to middle school. Knowledge of students' linguistic and schooling histories is key to

making informed decisions about language and instructional needs (Trumbull & Pacheco 2005).

Thus, among the five participants, only Ms. Schmidt appeared to consider that something other than whole language instruction in students' elementary schooling might be a factor in the reading problems she saw her students struggling with. However, none of the participants appeared to consider the possibility that perhaps one factor in the reading difficulties their EL learners were experiencing may have been due to transitioning to all-English classes for all of their instruction before they had attained a level of proficiency sufficient to benefit from instruction taught by teachers who typically have not been prepared to teach students who are learning English as a second language (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003).

The "conceptual enveloping" to which Shanahan referred and the ambivalence about taking responsibility for the language development of EL learners may result in part from how EL learners were represented in teachers' preparation programs. College course textbooks are often the primary means of presenting content. Watson, Miller, Driver, Rutledge, and McAllister (2005) reported in their review of 25 content area and foundations of education texts which are popular in pre-service teacher preparation programs that the percent of content pertaining to EL learners ranged from a low of 0% to a high of approximately 3%. The authors acknowledged that in many cases it was difficult for trained raters to determine the extent of EL-related content because information pertaining to these students and their needs was disbursed in the texts, appearing one paragraph at a time (p. 151). One rater further noted that many texts enumerated the problems encountered by EL learners but offered little in the way of solutions. Nonetheless, the small percentages reported suggest little attention to EL issues, a conclusion that supports the call of some (e.g., Commins & Miramontes, 2006;

Meskill, 2005) to infuse issues particular to EL learners throughout teacher training curricula.

While evidence suggests that EL representation in textbooks is insufficient to prepare teachers for the students they will teach, I suspect there is an additional element influencing participants' tendency to gloss over differences in their students which mirrors the glossing over of differences that occurs in general education classrooms.

### TEACHING ALL VS. TEACHING EACH

As is typical in general education classrooms (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; McIntosh & Vaughn, 1994), whole-class instruction predominated in 4 of the 5 resource classrooms observed. Students in these classrooms worked on the same activity under the direct supervision of the teacher for most of the reading period. As noted, I observed very little in the way of scaffolding or modifications; teachers did little with EL learners that they did not also do with native English speakers, and the modifications that occurred were spur of the moment. This parallels the findings of Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, and Fischer (2000) regarding the individualization and modification of reading instruction for students with LD, though the focus of that investigation was not specifically on modifications for EL learners. In their follow-up study of six special education teachers' grouping practices in elementary reading instruction, Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, and Fischer (2000) reported that whole class instruction was prevalent, and furthermore, that half of the teachers indicated that individualization should be "embedded in reading and should be incidental" (p. 312) as the teacher became aware of a need. Interestingly, similar to the findings of this study, Moody et al. documented little evidence of differentiation of instruction as it was delivered.

Research suggests there is a tendency to handle the diversity in skills present in whole class instruction arrangements by "teaching to the middle" (Rasinski & Padak,

2004), a practice acknowledged by Ms. Bautista and Mr. LeBlanc in the present study. For example, Mr. LeBlanc reported, "I teach to, I guess, middle to upper level of my classes.… I just don't know any other way to do it." Ms. Bautista explained that she tries to "find common ground," and attributed her practice of "teaching to the median" of her classes to her classroom reality of not having the "luxury" of one-to-one instruction. While reducing class size, by itself, is not a panacea for all educational ills (Porter & Soper, 2003), research suggests that lowering class size may increase individualized attention to students (e.g., Smith, Molnar, & Zahorik, 1999; Zahorik, Halbach, Ehrle, & Molnar, 2003), although Wang and Stull (2000), Everston (2000) and others point out that improvements in student outcomes with smaller classes likely will not occur without teachers making significant changes in their teaching. In other words, the full promise of reduced class sizes cannot be realized simply by providing the same instruction to smaller groups of students, in that individual instruction may not be individualized (Everston, 2000; Zahorik, Halbach, Ehrle, & Molnar, 2003).

Only Ms. Bautista noted the dilemma she faces in considering and addressing the needs of individual students within the context of whole-class instruction. She spoke about the individual needs of students, but then in teaching, "it's, 'Everybody, let's do it together.'" Shanahan (2001) posited that some of his mainstream teachers' "insistence on individualization" (p. 134) may have stopped them from investigating EL learner group characteristics and data-based instructional methods. In any case, unable to individualize for the needs of *each* student, Ms. Bautista focused on the needs of the whole group, with little attention to looking at characteristics and needs of sub-groups of students in her class.

Ms. Bautista was the only participant to refer explicitly to the dilemma of the "tensions between *All* and *Each*" (Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2004, p. 231) that

special educators in particular wrestle with in their efforts to meet the mandate of addressing the individual needs of each student with identified disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990) in the context of a classroom full of students. It appears that in some ways, general education's mission of providing a general education to large numbers of students—and thus to "focus on the sameness across students" (Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2004, p. 231)—has been adopted by special education teachers in their efforts to teach reading to large groups of students and handle their other responsibilities (Zigmond, 2001). Vaughn (Chamberlain, 2006) characterized today's large classes of students with disabilities as providing "not what's necessary but what's available," a result of the gradual increase in caseload and responsibilities demanded of special educators that has occurred since initial legislation safeguarding a free, appropriate public education. The result, Vaughn (Chamberlain, 2006) noted, is that special educators are struggling to provide the kind of instruction that "should not be considered a luxury but a necessity."

Zigmond (2001) suggested that recent policies on a national level (e.g., NCLB) are exerting pressure in the special education field to prepare students with disabilities to take the same assessments as mainstream students ("all means all", p. 4), an accomplishment to be achieved by providing students with LD access to the general education curriculum and holding high expectations. The push is to educate students with disabilities in the mainstream alongside their peers without disabilities and to hold them accountable in the same fashion (Zigmond, 2001). Such a position, Zigmond asserts, represents the "abandonment of core values" (p. 1) of special education, namely, an individualized instruction that has been carefully planned to address each student's unique needs. In terms of EL learners with disabilities, it appears that the "one-size-fits-all" orientation apparent at all levels of education (local and national) also characterized

the instruction of participants in this study, which failed to account for the language development needs of English-language learners with LD.

## Implications and Recommendations

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings and hypotheses of this study related to teaching reading to English-language learners with LD at the middle school level have several implications for teachers, schools, and programs. Participants acknowledged knowing very little about effective practices and reading instruction for EL learners. A first step in remedying this might entail presenting the faculty with data pertaining to the EL learners on their campus (e.g., the number of students who are designated LEP or who attended bilingual programs in elementary school), the countries they come from, how they seem to be progressing, etc.) and then surveying teachers at the campus level to identify needs and goals regarding teaching the EL learners attending their schools. Teachers should also be asked about preferences for the type of in-service training provided, as many models exist. This process would give teachers a greater sense of ownership in any professional development that ensued.

Middle schools need to provide more support to EL learners with and without disabilities. Teachers typically do not know how to scaffold their instruction for students with whom they have difficulty communicating, and many students lack sufficient skill in English to benefit from unmodified instruction to the extent necessary to reach high levels of achievement. Placing EL students in classrooms with monolingual English-speaking teachers who have little to no preparation in addressing the specific needs of students learning English as an additional language is a recipe for failure. Evidence of the failure of this common practice can be found in assessment outcomes for LEP students.

An important means of providing needed support is through preparing teachers for this growing segment of the student enrollment

Teachers need information about factors that influence EL learners' learning in the school setting, such as the second language acquisition process and students' need for language development. To immediately address teachers' lack of knowledge, they could collaborate with the ESL teacher on their campus and collaborate with him or her to learn how to develop language development goals and address them in their content area instruction. Only Ms. Schmidt recognized the ESL teacher as a resource who could provide her with information about her second language learners, although she was not the only teacher to have students who had exited ESL within the year. Schools should provide opportunities for teachers to meet with ESL teachers and could facilitate such collaboration through providing time for ESL teachers to attend grade-level or content-area meetings where they could meet with many teachers who teach the same group of students and/or who may have similar teaching practices and content matter (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). This practice would go a long way toward addressing teachers' need for professional development activities that are more closely aligned to the specific needs of teachers, given the specific students and content areas they teach.

Content area meetings attended by the ESL teacher might be an opportunity to share lesson plan ideas. Byrum, Jarrell, and Muñoz (2002) reported some success with an initiative in 25 high schools and learning centers in which teachers collaborated to regularly examine their teaching and improve instruction. They did this through a cycle of teaching, critiquing, revising, and reteaching lessons in a collaborative environment where teachers observed each other teach and gave feedback. Findings from the Byrum, Jarrell and Muñoz (2002) study indicate a "new culture" (p.2) had been created at the schools, and that teachers found the experience rewarding and effective in improving

their teaching. Although a program of lesson study may not suit every school or team of teachers, creating an environment where teachers can reflect and collaborate on lessons with other content area teachers as well as the ESL teacher could encourage teachers to include EL learners' needs in their planning considerations.

Although the present study did not focus on cultural aspects of education, the influence of culture was noted by one teacher who attributed some of the behaviors of her students to students' cultural values and cultural differences. Other teachers, viewing families' perceived values and practices through their own mainstream, middle-class lens, described deficits in the families who they perceived to not be doing their part regarding the education of their child. An in-service on effective practices for EL learners should include a component on the culture of mainstream schooling practices and information about the cultures represented in the school, such as common schooling practices and common patterns of interaction and communication in Mexico or other countries or ethnicities heavily represented at their school.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Findings of the present study also have implications for teacher credential programs. As discussed, it is clear that teacher preparation programs strongly influence the instructional practices of teachers. Because the pattern of who enters teacher education programs (predominantly white, middle-class women) seems likely to continue (Grant & Gillette, 2006), teacher preparation courses must prepare future teachers to teach students who are culturally and linguistically different from themselves, and in particular, students who are in the process of learning English. Grant and Gillette (2006) call for stronger efforts to recruit teacher candidates of color. They note that, given the current composition of teacher education faculties and preservice teacher candidates, candidates can anticipate only "limited opportunity to gain perspectives and insights" (p.

292) on issues of culture and diversity unless programs explicitly build in experiences that address these aspects of education.

In addition to addressing issues related to diversity and culture, teacher education programs also must prepare teacher candidates, including special education candidates, to address the language needs of EL learners. Public Law 104-110, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 places specific emphasis on students with limited English proficiency, students who are economically disadvantaged, students who represent major ethnic and racial groups, and students who have disabilities; many of the EL learners with LD share all of these characteristics (GAO, 2006). For those with limited English proficiency, a major thrust of Titles 1 and III of the Act is the attainment of English language proficiency and academic achievement (GAO, 2006). Although many features of good teaching for native English speakers are also components of good teaching for EL learners (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004; Vaughn, et al., 2003), effective instruction for students learning in their second language requires an additional focus on language development, e.g., vocabulary, the grammar system, registers of language use, academic language, etc. (Collier, 1995). The findings of this study suggest that teachers will need explicit instruction in how to identify the language skills needed for secondary content areas. Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll, (2005) reported that in their survey of more than 5,000 teachers in California, the more information teachers had about effective practices with EL learners, the more likely they were to identify challenges arising from existing limitations in their programs and the policies in place at their schools or the district level. Thus, armed with this knowledge, teachers would be more informed consumers of packaged programs and have the knowledge and skills to make adjustments that might benefit their students.

Special education teachers need to have a strong background in literacy and how to teach reading, given that 80% of students with LD have difficulty in reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Four of the five teachers in this study described reading instruction that reflects uneven alignment with what is known about good reading instruction. The CR program, for example, focuses on decoding to the near exclusion of higher-order, critical thinking skills; in effect, students' cognitive development was not addressed beyond the level of their reading ability. Ms. Schmidt's instructional practices included a tendency to rely on volunteers to summarize previous passages or to predict future events, and thus, those with weaker abilities could "hide" and avoid engaging in these comprehension activities. Only Ms. Janiak appeared to possess strong knowledge of how to teach higher-order comprehension skills and develop more critical thinking in students. With better preparation in reading instruction, teachers may have been less likely to view the program as a complete curriculum, more likely to be more reflective about their reading instruction, and thus to go beyond the packaged program to address other important, research-based components and features of skilled reading. As Richard Allington, previous president of the International Reading Association (IRA), stated, "If there is anything less scientific than a one-size-fits-all curriculum, I'm not sure what it might be" (2005, p. 3)

Teacher education programs must develop teachers who are willing to and able to work collaboratively with colleagues from different departments and who realize that responsibility for the education and success of EL learners is shared among the team of teachers. This is true in particular for special education teachers who may be assigned inclusion classes where they will work as a partner with the content area teacher to meet the instructional needs of students with learning disabilities. Teacher preparation programs could model cooperative planning, using different case studies or vignettes, for

example, thereby making explicit how teachers can collaborate with others at their campuses to plan for the content, skill, and language goals of EL learners with disabilities, modeling how teachers anticipate student needs, create a lesson that addresses content goals and language needs, and then reflect on the effectiveness of the lesson.

There is a need to prepare special educators at the secondary level to teach groups of students within the same classroom. The teaching assignment for many special education teachers is teaching resource content area classes (e.g., math, English language arts) to groups of 10, 15, or even more students. Elective assignments (e.g., reading, math skills) are equally large. Teachers will need to be prepared in how to group for maximum benefit as well as instruction in developing management skills for these instructional arrangements. The ability to effectively manage small groups in the context of the classroom may counter the one-size-fits-all approach to instruction (Vaughn, et al., 2003).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Reeves (2002, 2006) remarked that the question of what comprises "appropriate and equitable" instruction for EL learners is an important enterprise. In today's climate of increasing accountability for both EL learners and students with disabilities, teachers of EL learners with and without LD need information on how to make their curricula more accessible to EL learners and how to meet the needs of these students. To make research findings more valid and consequently, more applicable for teachers, research studies should clearly identify the characteristics (e.g., native language abilities as well as English language abilities) of their EL populations (Hopstock, 2003), given the variability of students identified as LEP, and, ideally, design clearly defined instruction for the different subpopulations of EL learners that attend schools. Research that focuses

on students who have attended US schools for at least 3 years and have had at least some bilingual schooling (including bilingual special education), for example, would be most useful to teachers like those in my study. Some areas that appear fruitful follow.

1. There is very little data available on what actually occurs in bilingual special education programs at the upper elementary grades (i.e., grades 4, 5, and 6). In light of district-level decisions that provide for minimal language support programs at middle school, it is critical to examine how upper elementary teachers are preparing bilingual education students (both with and without identified disabilities) for the transition to middle school. Specifically, how is reading instruction provided to students in the upper elementary grades in bilingual programs? What are the content and methods? How effective is this instruction? To what extent and in what ways is the native language used at these grades? What is teachers' thinking regarding the decisions they make in reading instruction at the upper elementary level? A related area concerns students who had received native language support and have since exited. How do teachers in grades 4, 5, and 6 at the elementary school currently provide reading instruction for their students who recently exited bilingual and/or ESL programs?

2. Expanding beyond reading instruction, how are middle school special education teachers providing content area instruction for students who have exited bilingual programs, including Bilingual Special Education, within a few years of their enrollment in middle school? Are teachers satisfied with their preparation/work with these students [do they even know who these students are]? What kind of supports do middle schools provide these students and their teachers?

3. How do our ESL teacher ed programs and /or BSE teacher credential programs currently address this crucial responsibility of preparing students for the transition to middle school where native language support is much less available? How effectively do

the instruction and learning experiences prepare teachers to address the needs of EL learners? How is effectiveness in this area ascertained and measured?

4. Are the research-based instructional programs for monolinguals with LD equally effective for EL learners with LD? (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Are they effective in narrowing the gap between the achievement of native English speakers and that of EL learners? What if any differences are found in how EL learners respond to these programs as compared to their monolingual peers? What modifications, if any, could be applied to improve outcomes for EL learners with LD?

5. In schools or districts where there is more emphasis on teachers having ESL training, has this preparation made a difference in the education of EL learners? In what ways, and what is the evidence? Do students from different language groups show similar patterns of progress in these programs, or do differences emerge? In what ways does the reading instruction provided by ESL-certified teachers differ from that provided by non-ESL-certified teachers?

6. Because classroom practices reflect and enact the culture of the mainstream, teachers need to understand the influence of culture on language development and the role of culture in school achievement (Téllez & Waxman, 2006; TESOL, 1997). Therefore, research should also be conducted to explore the effects of utilizing culturally relevant and culturally responsive materials and practices. Téllez and Waxman (2006) suggest that teachers learn about how students' cultural identifications influence their language learning—something that Ms. Bautista sensed but did not fully comprehend in regard to some of her students who, she perceived, were "determined" to speak Spanish and "hold on to the mother tongue."

Research should investigate these instructional issues and compare findings for the different subgroups of students with shared characteristics, such as those who

participated in bilingual education programs versus those who had ESL support, and compare findings for students from different language backgrounds, as well. Such research would inform our understanding of the schooling experience of EL learners with LD, and thus, allow us as a field to make changes in how we teach and how we prepare others to teach that would have far-reaching benefits for this population of students.

## Utility of the Findings

Possible limitations to the utility of the findings include the small number of participating teachers, and that all participants were special education teachers. I had anticipated the possibility of having general education teachers in the study, whose presence may have yielded a wider assortment of methods, practices, and differences in the content and methods of reading instruction provided to EL learners with LD. Given the strong influence of teachers' preparation on their instructional practices, general education language arts/reading teachers, whose education presumably would have included a strong background in reading methods, might have provided very different reading instruction.

The primary means of obtaining data for this study was interviews, with classroom observations included as a means of contextualizing what participants spoke about regarding the instruction they provided to EL learners with LD. All observations occurred between March and early May of 2002, and all schools (and teachers) had their state-wide assessments administered during that time. A limitation of this study, then, is the short time range of the observations. Although I felt that the number and length of observations conducted allowed me to attain the goal I had set out achieve (i.e., allowing me to understand the grounded context within teachers worked and to observe their instructional practices), it is possible that observations spread out over an entire school

year would have revealed additional or different practices, and might have led to additional or different hypotheses about teachers' reading instruction for EL learners with LD.

Another possible limitation of the study was the effect on the instructional practices of three of the participants of the adoption by their schools of the Corrective Reading Program for reading instruction. As discussed, reading programs had a strong influence on what teachers considered important to teach and the methods they used to teach content and skills. Thus, had the CR program not been in place, it is possible that teachers' reading instruction would have shown greater variability and more individualization than was noted in both teachers' discussions of their own teaching and in my observations. It is possible that in the absence of the scripted lessons of CR, teachers may have done more to modify or differentiate their instruction to address the needs of their EL learners.

Finally, the goals of study did not include an attempt to link student outcomes to practices, which would have provided additional depth to the study. And, although culture was alluded to by two teachers, this study did not examine cultural issues in the classroom organization and instructional practices of participating teachers. Such analysis might have provided a broader understanding of the context in which reading instruction occurred.

However, this study did provide a window onto the reading instruction provided to EL learners with LD at middle school level in the resource room setting. The findings provide us with data that reveal that these special education teachers' instructional practices were more closely aligned with the LD literature in terms of recommended methods and content than with practices recommended in the literature on second language learners. Teachers' descriptions of their reading instruction and my own

observations revealed instructional gaps and, for EL learners, a lack of attention to important language development needs. This provides direction for special education teacher preparation programs that integration of EL issues into preservice education is critical. Additionally, districts need to include EL content in inservice staff development.

## Conclusion

Effective, efficient reading is critical to positive educational outcomes. Teachers of young adolescent EL learners with LD who are reading several grade levels below placement have the challenging responsibility of improving students' reading abilities while they address students' language development. In an environment where federal mandates are applying pressure on districts to improve reading achievement for all students and to include all student groups in high-stakes assessments, the field of special education must examine its current practices in light of the characteristics—including language characteristics—of the students we serve. The population of students with disabilities who are also learning English is increasing, and we must consider what needs to be done to improve reading outcomes for EL learners with LD.

Studies exploring the knowledge, beliefs, and instructional practices of special educators regarding teaching reading to EL learners with learning disabilities at the middle school level have been largely absent in the research literature. This exploratory study has added to the knowledge base. This investigation is an important window into how special education teachers charged with improving the reading achievement of EL learners with learning disabilities perceive their work and provide instruction.

# APPENDIX A

## TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Teaching Reading to Middle School English-language Learners with Learning Disabilities in Reading:

Teacher Beliefs, Experiences, and Practices

You are invited to participate in a study to discover the beliefs, experiences, and practices of middle school teachers who are responsible for teaching reading to English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading. My name is Brenda-Jean Tyler and I am a graduate student in the doctoral program at The University of Texas at Austin in the Department of Special Education. This study is my dissertation research project, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree. You are being asked to participate in the study because you teach reading to students who are English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading who were in a bilingual special education program last year.

If you participate, you will be one of approximately 2-5 teachers participating in the study. If you decide to participate, I will arrange to meet with you during the month of January and, after some preliminary questions about your educational and professional history (e.g., What is your area of certification? How long have you taught reading to middle school students who are English-language learners with LD in reading?), I will interview you for about 45 minutes concerning your beliefs, experiences, and practices regarding reading instruction for English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading who recently transitioned from a bilingual special education program. This interview will be audiotaped and then, soon after, transcribed. I will summarize what I understood you to say regarding the topics, and then, during our second interview, I will provide you with this summary so that you can provide corrections or clarifications, as

needed, and/or you may expand on a topic, as you wish. I anticipate that our third interview will occur towards the end of the study, at which time I will provide you with a final opportunity to expand on or modify your responses to the interview questions. All tapes will be erased after completion of the study.

At our meeting for our first interview, I will also ask to set up an observation schedule. I would like to observe for an entire day to get a sense of the classes you teach, and then, with your assistance, decide which class(es) would be best to observe for the 8-12 observations. Each observation will be from approximately 1-2 hours in length.

The purpose of this study is to find out about the beliefs, experiences, and practices of teachers responsible for the reading instruction of English-language learners with LD in reading. The interviews and observations I conduct will not be used as part of your evaluation. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. If results from this study are published in a professional journal, information derived from interviews and observations will not be linked to your name and may be grouped with other teachers' information, thereby maintaining your anonymity.

Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin, the Austin Independent School District, or your school campus. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time after signing this form, should you choose to discontinue participation in this study, by simply letting me know of your decision via e-mail, fax, or telephone. Your signature indicates your willingness to participate in this study. You may keep a copy of this form. There is no cost associated with this study.

If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, you may call me at (w) 232-9482 or (h) 482-8274, or 785-8551 (cell), or you may call my supervisor, Professor Shernaz García, at 471-4161. My e-mail address is: bjtyler@mail.utexas.edu, and my fax number is 475-7281.

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, call Professor Clarke Burnham, Chair of the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants at 232-4383.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you do not want to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

# Appendix B

## FORMULARIO de CONSENTIMIENTO de PADRE o GUARDIÁN

Título del Estudio: La Enseñanza de la Lectura a los Estudiantes Bilingües Excepcionales que Tienen Deshabilidades/dificultades de Aprendizaje en Lectura:

LAS CREENCIAS, LAS EXPERIENCIAS, Y LAS PRÁCTICAS DE MAESTRAS

Su hijo/a está invitado/a a participar en una investigación de las creencias, las experiencias, y las prácticas de maestras sobre la instrucción de lectura. Me llamo Brenda-Jean Tyler, y soy una estudiante en el Departamento de Educación Especial en la Universidad de Texas en Austin. Este estudio se conducirá para cumplir con los requisitos para un doctorado en educación. Le pido permiso de incluir a su niño/a en este estudio porque la maestra de su hijo/a ha aceptado participar en esta investigación y me permitirá que la entreviste y la observe en sus clases, y su hijo/a es un estudiante bilingüe con deshabilidades/dificultades de aprendizaje en lectura en una de las clases de estas clases.

El estudio empezará en enero, 2002, y terminará en mayo, 2002. Planeo observar a la maestra de su hijo/a durante la enseñanza de la lectura aproximadamente 8-12 veces durante el estudio. Para ayudarme a entender la instrucción que observaro, estooy invitando a todos los estudiantes en la clase que participaron en un programa bilingüe de educación especial en el año pasado a participar. Su hijo/a fue elejido/a porque estuvo en un programa bilingüe de educación especial el año pasado. Espero que entre 2-5 maestras participen en el estudio, y aproximadamente 20 estudiantes.

Si le da permiso a su hijo/a de participar, repasaré sus expedientes de educación especial y tarjetas acumulativas de su educación. Porque el estudio se centrará en las entrevistas y en las observaciones de la maestra, su hijo/a no estará implicado/a directamente en el estudio. La información obtenida de los expedientes de educación y de

las tarjetas acumulativas no se compartirán con la maestra y no afectarán las calificaciones de su hijo/a. La información obtenida en relación con este estudio y que se puede identificar con su hijo/a se mantendrá en confidencia y será divulgada solo con su autorización.

Su decisión a permitir que su hijo/a participe en el estudio no afectará sus relaciones futuras con la Universidad de Texas, la escuela, o la maestra. Si tiene preguntas, favor de llamarme a 232-9482. Puede llamar a mi supervisora, la Profesora García a 471-4161. Si tiene preocupaciones sobre la participación de su hijo/a en este estudio, llama al Profesor Clarke Burnham, Presidente del Comité de la Examinación Institucional para la Protección de Participantes en la Investigación Humana en la Universidad de Texas [Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants] a 232-4383.

Sírvase guardar la copia adjunta de esta hoja.

Está tomando la decisión sobre la participación de su hijo/a en este estudio. Su firma abajo indica que ha leído la información y ha decidido permitir que su hijo/a participe en el estudio. Tiene el derecho de retirar su hijo/a en cualquier momento. Si decide más tarde suspender la participación de su hijo/a en el estudio, favor de avisarme (Brenda-Jean Tyler) por teléfono al 232-9482, o por carta a: Brenda-Jean Tyler, 3452-E Lake Austin Blvd., Austin, TX 78703.

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ | _____ |
| Nombre del estudiante | Fecha |
| _____ | _____ |
| Firma de Padres o Guardianes | Fecha |
| _____ | _____ |
| Firma de Investigadora | Fecha |

# Appendix C
## PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study: Teaching Reading to Middle School English-Language Learners with Learning Disabilities in Reading:

Teacher Beliefs, Experiences, and Practices

Your child is invited to participate in a study of teacher beliefs, experiences, and practices in reading instruction. My name is Brenda-Jean Tyler and I am a graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Special Education. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment for the doctorate degree. I am asking for permission to include your child in this study because your child's teacher has agreed to participate in this research study by allowing me to interview him/her and to observe in his/her classes, and your child is an English-language learner with learning disabilities in reading in one of the teachers' classes I will observe.

The study will start in January, 2002 and run through May, 2002. I plan to observe your child's teacher teaching reading in your child's class 8-12 times during the study. To help me understand the instruction I observe, I am inviting all students in the class who were in bilingual special education last year to participate. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he/she was in bilingual special education last year. I expect to have approximately 2-5 teachers participate in the study, and approximately 20 student participants in the study.

If you allow your child to participate, I will review his/her educational records, including special education records and his/her cumulative folder, including Individualized Educational Plan goals and objectives in reading, in order to better understand the classroom instruction. If there are portions of these records that you do not want me to review, you can specify these, and they will not be used in the study. Since

the focus of my study is observing and interviewing the teacher, your child will not be directly involved in the study. The information I get from your child's records will not be seen by the classroom teacher or affect your child's grades in any way. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Your decision to allow your child to participate will not affect your or his or her present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin, the school, or teacher. If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, call me at 232-9482 or 785-8551 (cell). You can call my supervisor, Professor García, at 471-4161. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's participation in this study, call Professor Clarke Burnham, Chair of the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants at 232-4383.

You may keep the copy of this consent form.

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue his or her participation at any time.

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ | _____ |
| Printed Name of Child | Date |
| _____ | _____ |
| Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian | Date |
| _____ | _____ |
| Signature of Investigator | Date |

# Appendix D

## ASSENT FORM

Teaching Reading to Middle School English-language Learners:
Teacher Beliefs, Experiences, and Practices

I agree to be in a study about teachers' experiences in teaching reading to middle school students. This study was explained to my parents/guardian and they said that I could be in it. The only people who will know about what I say and do in the study will be the person in charge of the study, Mrs. Tyler.

In the study, Mrs. Tyler will observe my reading teacher provide reading instruction to me and my classmates in my classroom. Mrs. Tyler will review my educational records, but will not share private information with the teacher.

Writing my name on this page means that the page was read (by me/to me) and that I agree to be in the study. I know what will happen to me. If I decide to quit the study, all I have to do is tell the person in charge of the study, Mrs. Tyler.

_____ _____

Child's Signature Date

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date

# Appendix E

***Interview Guide/Question Springboards***

1. What do you know (and then believe) about "good" reading instruction for English-language learners with LD? *(What would it include/look like?)*

2. What do you know (and then believe) about the nature of the reading difficulties exhibited by their EL learners with LD? *(Describe areas of need, name contributing factors, describe the conversational and then the academic abilities (in English) of EL learners with LD)*

   - If they mention language*: Do you feel that the fact that a student is a second language learner has an impact on his or her reading? If **YES**, in what ways?*

3. How do you describe your own reading instruction for ELLs with LD in reading? *(What does it include/look like? What kinds of things do you consider regarding EL learners when **planning** the presentation of a reading lesson)*

4. What have been your challenges and successes in teaching reading to English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading?

# Appendix F

## Teacher Demographic Questionnaire

**Teaching Reading to Middle School English Language Learners with LD in Reading: Teacher Beliefs, Experiences, and Practices**

Name: _____ School: _____
(will remain confidential)

Subject(s) that you are teaching: _____

## Background Information

(Please circle)

**1. Gender:** Male Female

**2. Age:** <30 30-40 41-50 >50

**3. Ethnicity: (Circle all that apply)** White African American Hispanic
Asian/ Pacific Islander Native American Other

**4.** Number of Languages spoken proficiently: _____**.**

**5. Highest Degree Earned:** B.A./B.S. M.A./M.Ed. Ph.D./Ed.D. Ed.S.

**6.Teaching Certification:** (Circle all that apply) El. Ed. Second. Ed. Spec. Ed. Bilingual/ESL
Reading Specialist Alternative Cert.

**7. Is your certification** (Circle all that apply) general (e.g., 1-6) or in a specific content/special area?

**If so, what area(s)?**

_____

**8. Number of years teaching experience: _____.**

**9. Number of years teaching the subject you currently teach _____.**

**10. Number of (a) courses in teaching reading/language arts (approx.): _____.**

**(b) inservice hours in reading/language arts in the last 3 years: (approx.) _____**

**(c) courses in teaching ESL/second language learners (approx.) _____**

**(d) inservice hours in instruction for ESL students _____**

**11. Describe your level of confidence that your reading instruction for your second language learners with learning disabilities in reading is effective:**

**1 -** I am **very confident** that the reading instruction I provide my second language learners with LD in reading is effective in improving their reading ability.

**2 -** I am **somewhat confident** that the reading instruction I provide my second language learners with LD in reading is effective in improving their reading ability.

**3** - I am **unsure** about whether the reading instruction I provide my second language learners with LD in reading is effective in improving their reading ability.

**4** - I am **not very confident** that the reading instruction I provide my second language learners with LD in reading is effective in improving their reading ability.

**5 -** I am **really not confident** at all that the reading instruction I provide my second language learners with LD in reading is effective in improving their reading ability.

**The reason(s) I say that is**

_____

_____

# Appendix G

### Researcher As Instrument Statement

## Cultural Forays

**FAMILY MATTERS**

I grew up with an awareness of a certain amount of diversity within my own family. My mother is Canadian, of Welsh, Irish, and Scotch extraction. At the age of 8, soon after the death of her father, she and her family moved from "The Island," as they always referred to Prince Edward Island, to Montreal, Canada. Montreal, then as now, was a cosmopolitan, diverse city, though perhaps the ethnicities represented by the immigrants have shifted in recent decades. French and English, then as now, are the two dominant cultures. Some of my mother's schooling was conducted in French, with English language textbooks for support. My mother is very proud of her Canadian heritage, and to this day, has resisted becoming an American citizen. As a Canadian, my mother's manner of speech is different from my father's and from that of almost everyone else I encountered growing up: she not only consistently articulates the letter "r"--even at the end of syllables—but, when I was little, she also still had the Canadian speech habit of tacking on, "eh?" after declarative statements. More exotic to us children, my mother would frequently give directives in French; "Fermez la porte!" and "Fermez la boîte!" sounded much more interesting and compelling than their English equivalents of "Shut the door!" and "Be quiet!" My father would regularly tease my mother about being a "foreigner," and he would jokingly blame her for the cold winter wind that they

called the “Montreal Express” which swept in periodically from Canada to chill us in the Northeast.

My father, on the other hand, was reared in a metropolitan Boston neighborhood, surrounded by cousins and neighbors who had similar ethnic and religious backgrounds. My father has always very proudly talked of his Irish heritage. Unlike some families of European American ethnicities who do not appear to know or care what their ethnic background is, my family has always identified itself as Irish. Irish reigned supreme in my family, and we all looked forward to the special treat of Irish soda bread at St. Patrick’s Day and watching the parade and festivities associated with this day celebrating ethnic pride.

**NEIGHBORHOOD AND SCHOOL EXPERIENCES**

I grew up in the 60s and 70s in a small town north of Boston, in a white, working class/lower-middle class neighborhood. Probably because there were very few families that were not white in my town when I was growing up, “diversity” meant, “not Irish” when I was very young. Along my street I was aware that our neighbors were different from my family: there were families with backgrounds as diverse as Italian, Polish, Danish, Swedish, German, and English. I couldn’t really discern great differences from my own family in these families except perhaps in their family dynamics and in other small ways, such as in some of the foods they ate or hygiene routines. Some families were much smaller than my own, with only 2 children rather than the 3 or 4 of most neighborhood families. The mothers of some of these families drove a car and held outside jobs, unlike my own mother. I remember being surprised to learn that one of the

Italian families down the street made homemade pasta dishes at holidays rather than the turkey and fixings of my own--and seemingly universal--experience. I still recall the shock I felt as a teen to learn that a neighborhood friend did not bathe every day, as I did, and in fact not even every week. My friend indicated that in her family, only the father bathed every week. This taught me an important lesson about assumptions, as I had assumed everyone bathed or showered daily, while she assumed everyone (except her father) bathed every other week.

In school, my experience with diversity grew by small increments. Though the ethnicities of the student enrollment of the schools I attended reflected to a large extent that of my neighborhood, there were a few groups that were new to me: my sister had a Jewish teacher, I met a boy of Portuguese extraction, and, in high school, I became aware of a few African American families, a girl of Greek ancestry, a girl of Spanish background, and I discovered that a boy I was acquainted with was of Puerto Rican heritage. In addition to gradually expanding my experience with students from different ethnicities, races and cultural backgrounds, I also developed a small inkling of other sources of difference: I became school chums with a boy with significant hearing loss in 5$^{th}$ grade, and I had a home economics class with two girls with mental retardation in junior high school. However, academic tracking was openly in effect at that time, and in my required core academic classes in junior high, I do not recall any students whose academic abilities differed significantly from my own.

In high school I was finally able to study a foreign language; I had been anticipating with excitement following in the footsteps of my older sisters by studying

French. Now I would be able to respond to my mother's orders in French, and join the inner circle of those in my family who could speak and understand French. Little did I know that this experience would be the first step of a long journey that literally shaped the course of my life.

Perhaps because of the tracking in junior high and the resulting homogeneous abilities of my classmates, as I entered high school, I had not yet developed an identity of myself as being really strong in any area. French class changed that completely. An inconsistent student of mathematics, an adequate student of the sciences and history, a good student of English, I found to my delight that I excelled in French. Other students stumbled on the alien pronunciations, struggled with all the new vocabulary, became frustrated with the seemingly convoluted grammar, but not I. I surpassed my mother's ability to help me with my homework as her knowledge of the details of the language had become rusty by this time, while my own knowledge was rapidly expanding.

I quickly became enthralled with the notion that people from other countries and cultures expressed everyday, common sentiments and needs in ways very different from English: "J'ai froid," "I have cold" rather than "I am cold," as in English, for example. A different way of interpreting one's relation to oneself and to the world was expressed through the language. Through the cultural readings in French class, I became aware of the world beyond my little town. I was absolutely fascinated to learn about how people talked and expressed themselves, what they ate, how their school systems worked, and generally how people lived their lives in other countries.

My sophomore year, I began studying Spanish in addition to French. My French teacher, a Greek immigrant married to a Dutchman, encouraged my passion for languages. In Spanish class, a girl with Spanish ancestry exposed us to the Castilian habit of lisping, in contrast to the Central-South American dialect of Spanish taught in the textbook. I noticed with interest that the teacher did not necessarily approve of this. My cultural horizons widened a bit more. I joined an international pen pals organization, and began corresponding with students my age from France and Spain. During the fall of my junior year, I began teaching myself German, and I joined the German 1 class during the spring of that year. The German grammar was quite different from French and Spanish, and different from English, as well. My curiosity was peaked; unlike most students my age, I began spending my spare time scouring the shelves of the public library for books about languages. I was fascinated to learn the history of how the Romance languages derived from Latin, the history of the Germanic languages, and read with interest how English had developed, as well. I developed an interest in peoples' given names, and read books that illustrated how a name, for example, "Charles," underwent modification to suit the sound system of the language of a people, appearing as "Carlo," "Carlos," "Karel," "Karl," and even "Charlton."

I added Italian during my senior year to the other three languages I was studying. To my delight, in the spring of that year my Italian teacher asked me to "read" her Italian-language dissertation, with an eye for grammatical and spelling errors. I agreed, and, drawing on my nascent knowledge of Italian orthography and grammar, was able to provide feedback on her draft.

By now, I was corresponding with students from France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Norway, Switzerland, and places as far away and exotic as Saudi Arabia and Belize. Early on, I learned something about how others view the United States from my pen pals, as a girl from Norway asked repeatedly about cowboys—which, as a New Englander, I had never seen or considered part of my culture. Cowboys were as distant and foreign to me as they were to my Norwegian pen pal, but she persisted in asking about cowboy life. My correspondence with girls from Europe, which we tried to write half in English and half in their native languages, were rich sources of information about teenage life halfway around the world. From my letters with these teens during high school and the first two or three years of college, I learned about the hopes, fears, and everyday happenings and difficulties of present day Germans, French, and Spanish, as one pen pal wrote about her experiences working as a lab technician in a hospital clinic in Switzerland, another wrote about the ostracism she endured from her family after becoming romantically involved with a black man, and another wrote of the prejudice of her neighbors after she had a baby by an Iranian young man.

**COLLEGE AND JUNIOR YEAR ABROAD**

I attended a small, private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, where I majored in French and German. To satisfy my ever-present thirst, I dabbled in Russian for one year, and took a course in American Sign Language, as well. However, French and German were my primary foci, and it was a natural extension of my studies to spend my junior year abroad. I spent the fall of my junior year studying in Paris, and the spring in Freiburg, Germany, a small city within an hour or so from the French and Swiss borders.

I took full advantage of this opportunity. Over the course of the year, I was finally able to meet several of the young women I had been corresponding with since high school and visit them with their families. These visits provided a window into their lives that the letters had not. I visited a Belgian friend whose grandmother had delicate horsehair-stuffed furniture in the living room. I stayed with a family in the north of Spain who routinely visited a relative for hair washing and bathing, since my pen pal's family's financial resources did not allow for running hot water. I visited an Alsatian young woman in Switzerland whose friends and co-workers included Slavs, Swedes, and Egyptians. I stayed with another Spanish pen pal whose bathtub was about half the size of the typical American's, where the hot water heater was normally turned off, but could be made available with the turn of a knob. All of the families had small refrigerators, compared to those in the US, even in families where money did not seem to be tight; I discovered that people simply shopped more often and bought in smaller quantities. I reveled in all of the new experiences. I spent Christmas that year dancing at a discotheque with a pen pal from Valladolid, Spain, while I spent New Year's Eve in laughter with another pen pal from Tudela, Spain, as she, her sisters, and I struggled to succeed in the Spanish tradition of eating 12 grapes as the clock strikes 12.

I discovered in Paris that young people of my own age were frequently very knowledgeable and involved in politics; I was often quizzed about American foreign policies and politics, of which I was very ignorant. Though they, like I, were university students, the students in Paris and Freiburg, Germany, seemed more involved and participatory in the activities of adult life and seemed more like citizens of the world than

American college students. By comparison, the students on my college campus, who seemed largely consumed by life in the microcosm of a college campus, seemed hopelessly narrow-minded and immature. Furthermore, I had grown up with the belief that the US and the American people were generous, friendly, warm-hearted, and benevolent towards all. Any doubts or caveats raised by my Canadian mother's occasional critical remark about the American Way to the contrary were drowned out by the positive messages of the media. However, I discovered in Europe that our foreign policy was considered by some to be aggressive, prejudiced, imperialistic, hegemonic, and in fact was frequently viewed with a large measure of suspicion. It was quite a shift in world view to entertain the notion that my impression of the US and Americans was not shared by everyone else around the world. For the first time, I began thinking about how isolated the US was, and realized that Europeans were not--could not afford to be--as ignorant and unaware of others because their neighbors were literally within very easy reach. I realized how people's views of others and, indeed, of themselves, are shaped to a significant extent by the media, which filter information and create images.

Towards the end of my spring semester in Freiburg, I met a young man from Iraq, and soon I was in love. I decided to stay in Germany over the summer. We both obtained jobs as salesclerks at a gift shop on a lake in south Germany, selling trinkets and souvenirs to American and European tourists. My co-workers were for the most part French and German local people, while some were Scottish and American students, like myself. This work experience was another opportunity to learn about French and German

perspectives on everyday events and issues directly from people of that culture. And, again, I learned about how Americans are sometimes perceived by others.

I came back to the States at the end of the summer, engaged to my Iraqi, and resumed my college studies my senior year, but I felt at loose ends. My friends who had spent a semester abroad and I resumed our friendships, and we could often be found late at night discussing our experiences, trying to come to a working understanding about what we had learned about others around the world and about ourselves during our time abroad. The activities that seemed to consume many students on Friday and Saturday nights, never as compelling for us before our trips abroad, no longer held any appeal for us. We were coming to terms with being back in America, on a small-town campus where there was little reason even to venture forth from campus, and the most pressing issue was to find a way to get the neighbor to keep her stereo down at night.

**Teaching Experience**

I graduated with a degree in French and German, but had a difficult time finding work utilizing my skills with languages. I returned to my home town in the Northeast, where I married my husband. While my husband adjusted to life in America, I began substitute teaching at a junior high and high school in my home town. My teaching assignments included many days of substituting for language teachers, and an extended post substituting for a teacher of students with mental retardation who was out on maternity leave. I obtained a full-time position as a teacher aide in a residential school serving emotionally disturbed adolescent girls in a metropolitan Boston suburb. I worked there for more than 3 years, eventually sharing house parenting duties with my husband

in a sort of half-way house where we lived with our small daughter and three girls who were transitioning to less restrictive settings. I continued working in the school's classrooms as an aide and "substitute" teacher. I enjoyed working with the girls but found it to be a very emotionally draining experience. Soon after I became pregnant with our second child, we left the school and I became a stay-at-home mother. Within a few years, I obtained a part-time, seasonal position with a government agency. Though my own household was a little island of biculturalism, we had been swallowed by American suburbia.

**Graduate School**

Feeling stagnant and seeking to expand career opportunities, my family and I moved to Texas. A year later, I enrolled in the master's program in special education at the local University. In the multicultural special education program, I was able to combine my long-standing interest of working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with my interest in students who learn differently. Through my coursework, I learned information that helped explain traits I had become aware of in my husband. For example, though his English improved quite a bit during the first few years after his arrival in the US, it seemed to reach a plateau and improved very little after that. I wondered why he couldn't perfect his English skills, and why he seemed to forget a mini-lesson on helping verbs, for example, by the next time he needed to use one in a sentence. My coursework explained the phenomenon of fossilization.

As I earned my master's degree, I simultaneously went through the teacher certification program. During my semester of observation and student teaching, it became

clear that as a special education teacher, I would most likely be teaching reading and math to students with disabilities. At the end of the certification program, however, I realized I had not learned much about teaching reading or math through my prescribed coursework. I entered the doctoral program with the goal of learning as much as I could about teaching reading to students who were culturally and linguistically diverse with learning disabilities. I began working as a graduate research assistant in the Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts, and immersed myself in the activities afforded at the Center— reading dozens of articles related to reading research, participating in meetings and retreats at which we all talked about, conceptualized, and planned future research studies, and of course, working in the field observing teachers and conducting interviews with participants in the Center's research studies.

As I was immersing myself in reading research and reading instruction, I also took a course on cross-cultural interactions in special education. I had more than a few "Aha!" moments in that class, where family dynamics in my own household were made clearer. I had often chalked up differences in how my husband, an Iraqi-American, and I interpreted someone's words or actions to my husband's suspicious nature or to his simply not understanding American culture. Now I realized that my cultural lens led me to interpret an event one way, while my husband's cultural lens led him to believe something completely different—in other words, both of us were interpreting the event "correctly," given our cultural backgrounds. For example, I could never understand why my husband complained that our daughter, Aminah, was "disrespectful" to him whenever he had reprimanded her for something she had done. I dismissed this complaint as

unfounded—after all, I had witnessed many such reprimands, and Aminah always stood at attention, looked him directly in the eyes as he chided her, and offered a defense or explanation of her behavior. This communicated to me that she was aware her father was angry with her behavior, she was giving him her full, undivided attention, and she was reporting to him what she thought was a good reason for the offending behavior.

One day when he was particularly agitated, my husband shouted that he should not have to tell Aminah this, but she should be looking down at her feet while he reprimanded her and say only that she is sorry. At the time, I mediated between them, and reminded my husband that Aminah was growing up in American culture, where children are expected to look at adults when the adults are addressing them, etc. This exchange highlighted a few tenets of my husband's culture that differed from my own. The cross-cultural course helped me understand that my husband and I (and everyone else) are simply operating under the often unspoken rules of our cultures. As human beings, we are all interpretative agents, and we all interpret others' behaviors and regulate our own according to our culturally-bound norms and expectations.

**The Present Study**

It was through my work for the Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts that the germ for the current research project formed. As the Graduate Research Assistant for a reading strategy intervention study conducted in two area middle schools, I observed, interviewed, and met regularly with all of the participating teachers and the lead investigator as a group. The general education science/social studies teacher at one school lamented in our group meetings from time to time that she did not know how to reach her

English language learners. She felt that many of them did not have sufficient English skills to gain much benefit from her instruction. She was monolingual English and struggled to find a way to teach these students. Then, one day as I chatted with the general education math teacher between classes—who was Hispanic and could speak some Spanish--she remarked that there were many ESL students in her lowest math group. She added that her ESL students, unlike the Anglos in that class, were usually capable of doing the math as soon as she explained the language of the problems to them.

I can still recall the shock I felt, the strange, unsettled feeling that came to my stomach, the embarrassment and shame for the school system, and finally, the anger I felt at her words. I went home that day with a lot to think about. How could this be happening nowadays? Why weren't the children still receiving language support, since there was still a clear need? Why weren't teachers being provided with the training and materials necessary to be effective with ELLs? What would be the long-term effects of the "dumbing down" of the curriculum these students were experiencing as a result, perhaps, of the school's well-meaning intent to reduce the cognitive load for these students who were still learning English? How would teachers respond to this additional challenge? Would teachers—already carrying a full plate--simply come to ignore these students, or would they be spurred to go and get training and materials that would help them reach their ELLs? I wondered in particular about the instruction English language learners were receiving in the Reading/English Language Arts areas. The instruction that ELLs receive in Reading/Language Arts forms the foundation upon which much of their other learning depends.

Knowing that bilingual special education is not provided at the middle school level or beyond, I wondered who provided reading instruction to ELLs with identified disabilities, and what did the instruction they provide look like. What kind of training had these teachers had to prepare them to "reach and teach" their English language learners? And, had their training to teach reading been more substantive than what I had experienced in my certification program? These questions spurred me to conduct the present study.

**NI Strategy**

I chose the NI strategy to collect and analyze the data in my study because I am interested in learning about teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and instructional practices from the perspectives of the participating teachers. I am not interested in merely presenting my interpretation of the instruction I observed or my understanding of teachers' responses to interview questions about their students and their teaching; I have learned very well over the years that my own understanding of anything is really just one of many possible ways to interpret phenomena. I believe that providing a medium through which teachers' voices can be heard has the potential to be a very powerful means of communication.

**The Roles and Obligations of Teachers**

I have a great deal of respect for classroom teachers today, and especially for those who teach students with learning disabilities. All teachers to some extent must perform the duties of disciplinarian, diagnostician, cultural mediator, cheerleader, nurturer, social worker, tutor, appointment secretary, data entry clerk, counselor, nursemaid, social skills teacher, parent liaison, researcher, and even at times translator—

in addition to and even as they provide content area instruction; special education teachers must do all of these tasks to an even greater extent, due to the characteristics and needs of the children with identified disabilities whom they teach. Furthermore, special education teachers are often provided with the same curriculum as the general education teachers, with no guidelines as to how to modify the suggested/required texts and expected products for students who have not been successful in the general education classroom because their reading and writing skills are 2, 3, 4, and even 5 grade levels below those of their same-age peers. As a result, special education teachers often assume the role of curriculum developer and materials procurer, as well. I appreciate the challenges and time commitment this array of roles and duties represents.

However, I believe the job of a teacher is, in the end, to teach the children in his or her classroom. Children, like teachers, are members of multiple communities based on social, religious, economic, ethnic, cultural, and language characteristics, to name some factors by which we group ourselves. I believe teachers have an obligation to establish an environment where all children feel welcomed, valued, and appreciated for who they are as members of the communities they represent. If this means seeking out and collaborating with cultural insiders, doing research, or going out and acquiring new skills in order to better communicate across community borders, then I believe the teacher has a moral duty to make a very strong effort do so. To ignore students' backgrounds is to imply that where a student comes from, that is, the communities he or she represents, is irrelevant.

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